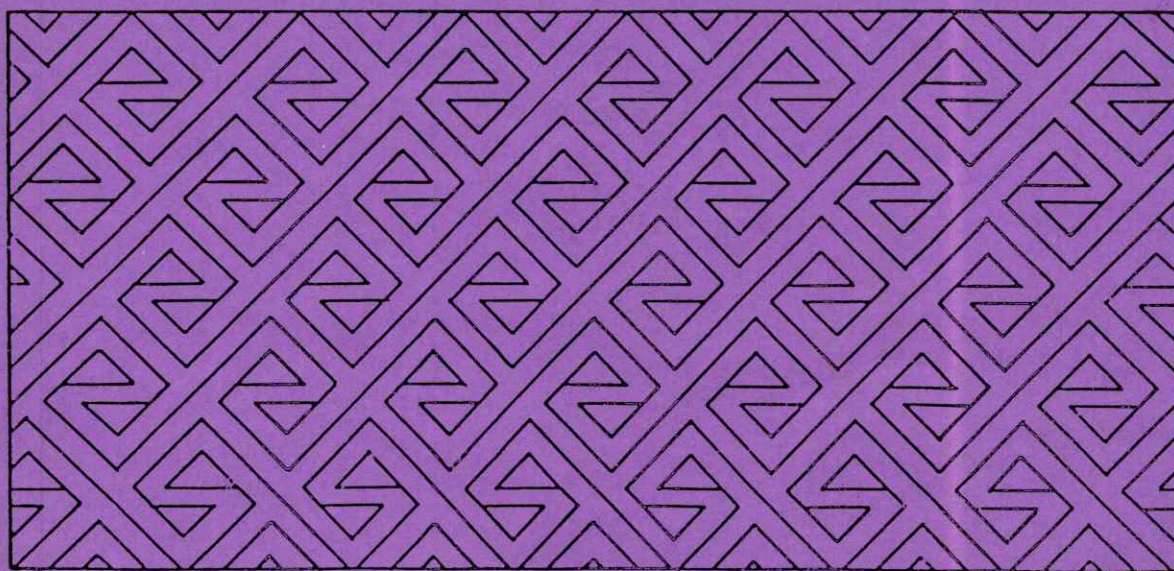
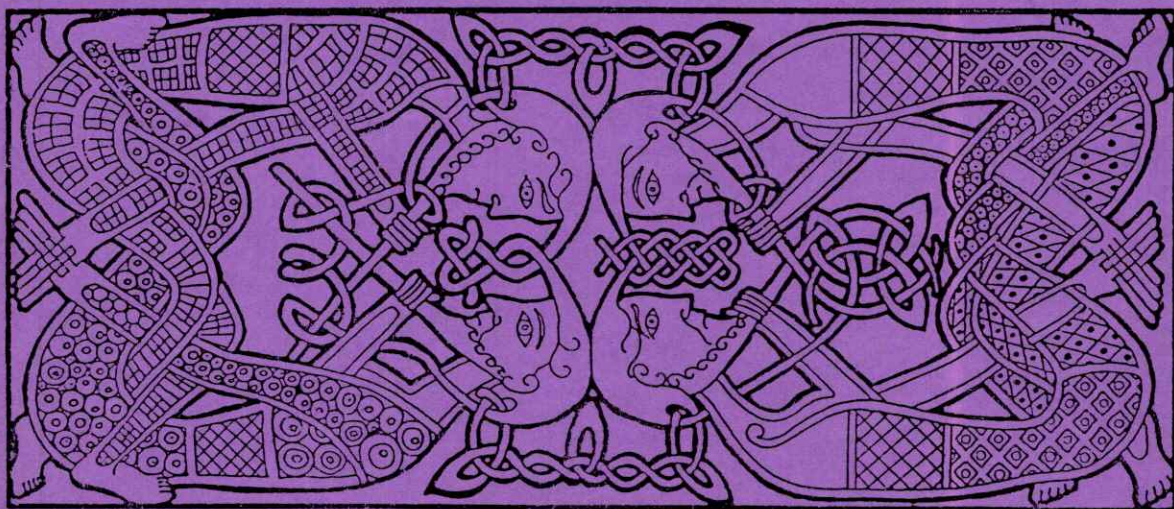
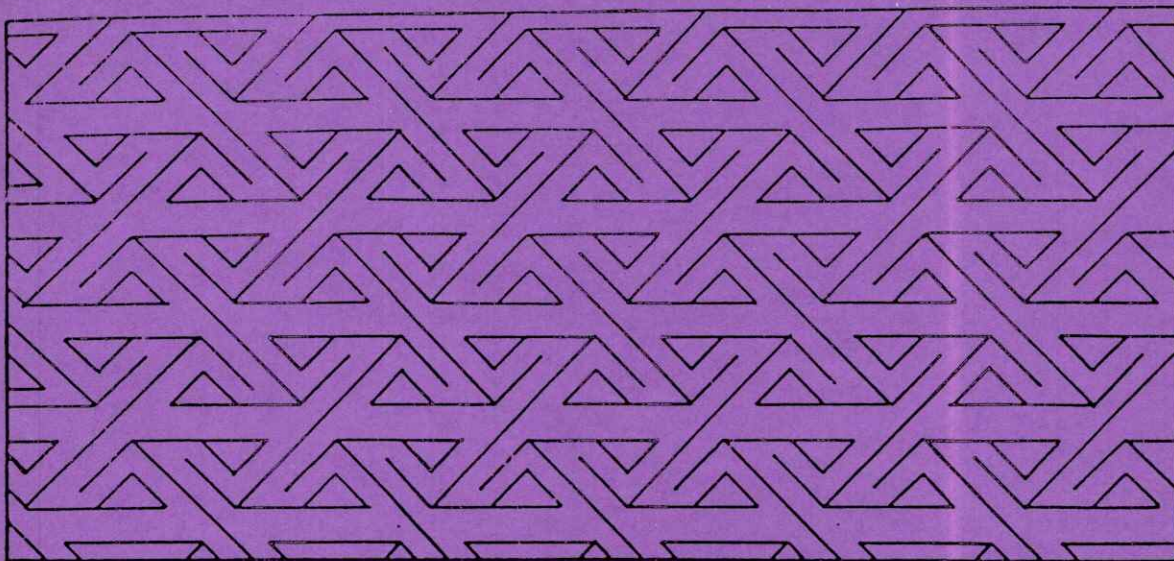


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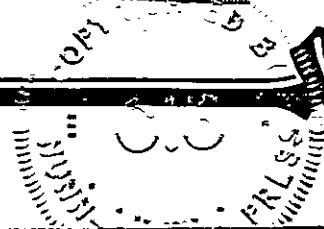
SCOTCH

DOUBLES

III

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SCOTCH DOUBLES III

Is an adult zine containing graphic sex, violence, strong language, bad puns, excellent stories & a couple so-so ones and other good stuff. Scotch Doubles III will not be knowingly sold or supplied to persons under the age of 21 years and a statement there to is required when ordering.

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By: Nunn-Better Press - For all authors -

View From On Top



Welcome to the third issue of Scotch Doubles. You'd think after producing two previous zines the third would be a charm, yeah and I've got some lovely waterfront property to sell in the Everglades. Despite the pitfalls, printing problems and a partner going mentally awol it got done. I hope you enjoy it.

New to the SD family is stories in the Eroica universe. The writer isn't new to fandom or the art of scribbling. We welcome her to our zine and look forward to including more of her work in SDIV.

Two familiar tales are back in the second part of continuing stories; Paige Garnett continues her Bodie is a merman series and a new writer to SD know mysteriously as "M" has taken up the reins of the Sprite series and continued it from where it was left off in SDII.

The other continuing series is of course Scotch Doubles, the Pros/Champions crossover that started this whole empire. In the spirit of this year's theme of MediaWest, that being old-time radio shows, SDII is done in the same style of Murder Mystery Theater, Bring 'Em Back Alive or the Shadow, plenty of plot twists and chilling cliff-hangers.

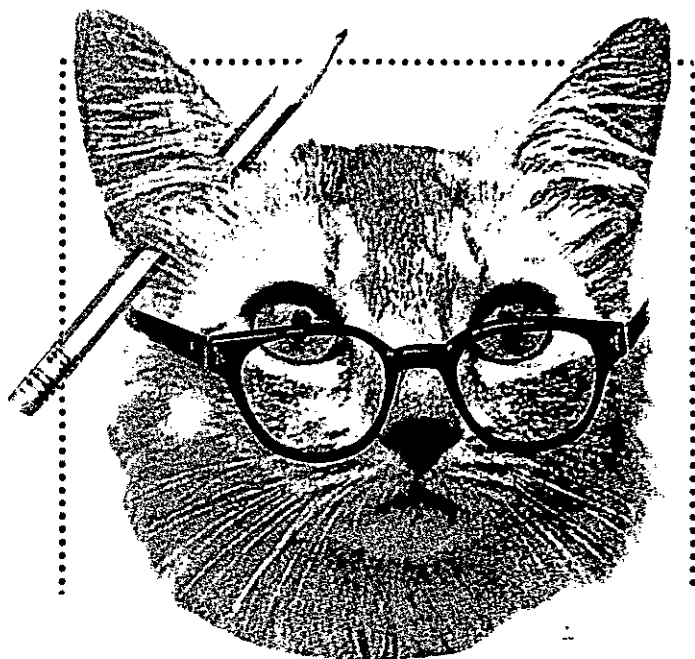
And speaking of chilling, we're offering a first in SD - poetry. I know, I said no poems, but these are different - haunting, chilling (there's that word again), noir verse about one of my favorite toothy media hunks, Forever Knight. Not for the faint hearted.

I'd like to offer my sincere thanks to MC for lending a midnight hand to the editing and arduous process of printing this tome. Without you dear, there wouldn't be a SDII and I'd be in jail.

Also a hug and thank-you to Gail for coming out of retirement that weekend in the country, lending an ear and setting me on a clearer course. A new voice - is a voice listened to. Thanks for putting it in perspective and getting me to shake off the last vestiges of RC guilt. We are our own keepers.

And speaking of keepers (like that segue?) this zine is bound (get it???) to be one - so what are you waiting for READ IT ! (Or I may be forced to pun again...you've been warned!)

Sue



Editor's Page

Being unable to write anything without their red and blue pencils (we took them away from the ladies and they're going through withdrawal) our lovely, kind, sweet, easy-going (cough... cough...) editors have nothing to say, so, (yeah I used 2 commas with only one word in-between - got a problem) I've taken the liberty of speaking on their behalf (is that the right half or left half? Why only half? Has it something to do with wits? -sorry I digress) by offering this cartoon.

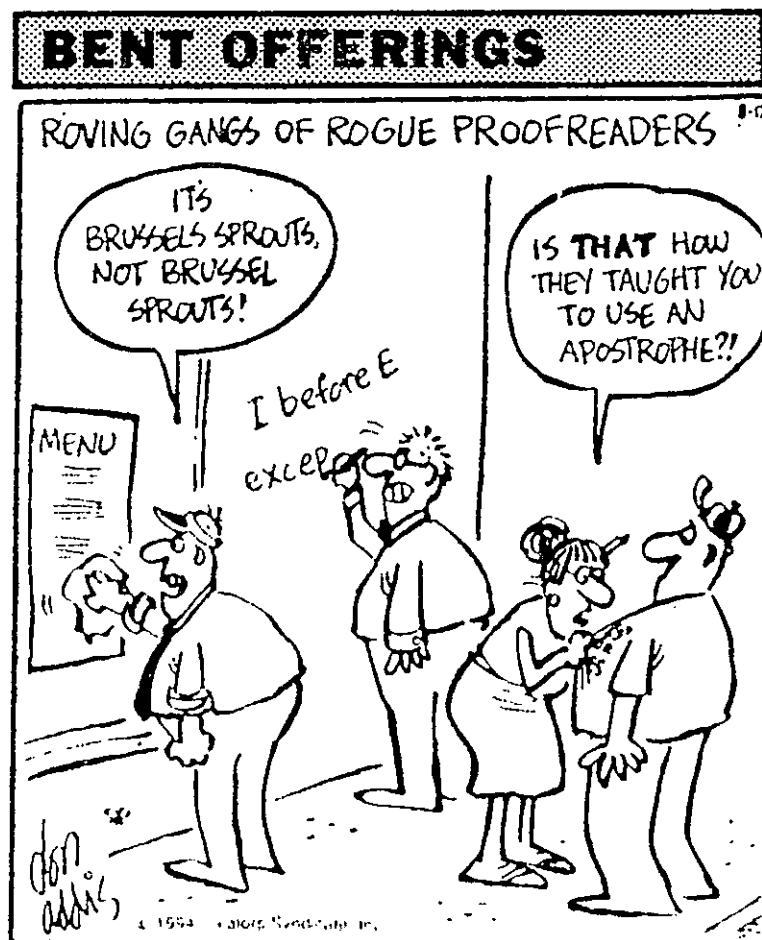
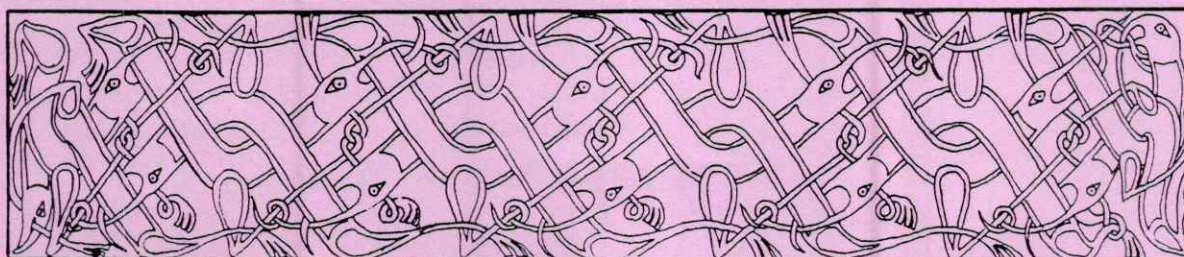
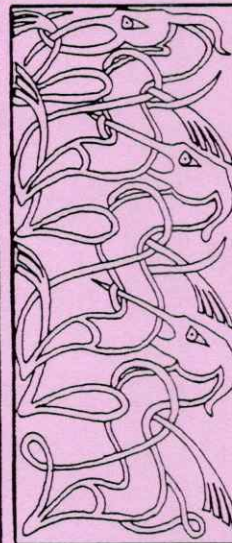
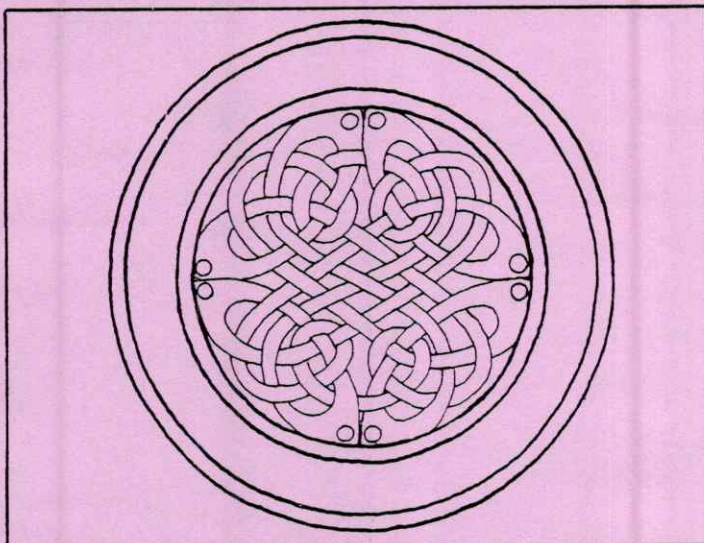
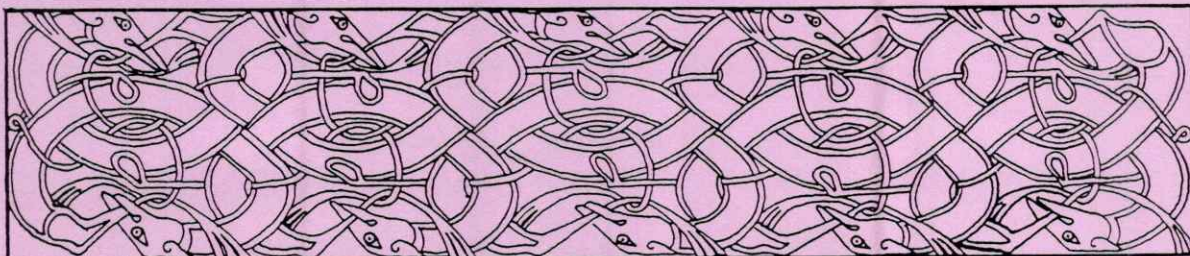
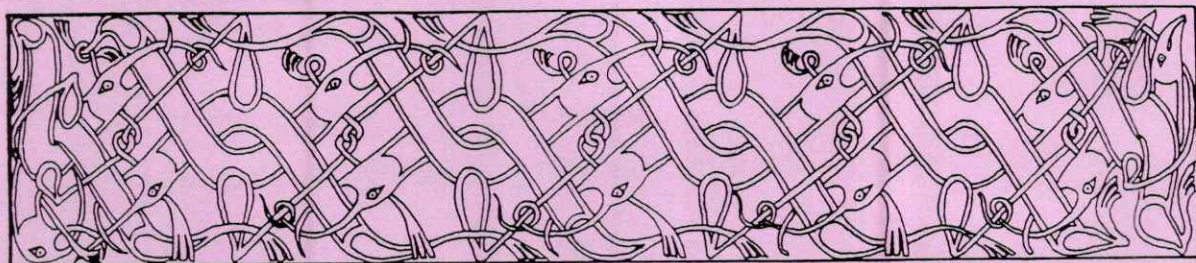


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Summer In The City

By Hwar Goh Tsu

It was the eighth of July 1982 and so far the summer had been a long hot one. The London night was humid and you could see steam rise as the light rain evaporated off the sun-baked pavement. Music blared from every car radio, every open door, from boom boxes that were carried on the streets, and from the row of trendy clubs that lined the west-end streets. On any corner you the musical talents of The Who, David Bowie, or one of the many American hard rock bands throbbing through the air.

Klaus von Eberbach was following a tip that lead him to this side of the city and specifically to this night club.

The Candy Stripe was one of those places that played the music so loud you had to shout over it to be heard. The dance floor took up two-thirds of the room and the bar the remaining third. In-between, if you were lucky, you could find tables that were just large enough to hold your drinks. It was even hotter inside the smoke-filled club than it was outside.

Klaus managed with his usual talent to overtake one of the tables when a couple abandoned it to dance. He was at this moment searching the crowd for a young man with black hair, dressed all in black leather who had requested a meeting here. There were too many bodies gyrating on the dance floor for him to see anyone clearly, and to make matters worse a least half of them were wearing black.

Klaus was a Major with NATO, he was an intelligence agent; a spy. He was very good at his job and normally he never let anything or anyone get in the way of his execution of that duty.

A waitress with green hair made motions to get his attention and he ordered a gin on the rocks. As he waited for his drink to arrive Klaus examined the other tables and the bar eager to spot his contact. Most of the people were young, in their twenties or younger, and they were dressed as punks with brilliantly colored spiked hair or as mods who wore the latest clothes and their hair long. Klaus lit one of his cigarettes, hoping that the young man would find him and soon; it would not be an easy job to search the dance floor looking for him.

At the next table a couple of boys, at least the Major thought they were - it being hard to tell the boys from the girls these days - were necking. He turned away and hoped to hell that he was able to get out of here soon.

His drink arrived then and thinking ahead he ordered another one right away, that way he would be done with the first one by the time she returned with the second.

The dance floor was dark until the sweeping spotlights picked out the cavorting dancers in bright colors. It was dizzying to watch and exciting to be a participant of the ritual.

Twenty minutes later Klaus' second drink arrived, and the pounding beat of the wild music changed to a slower, almost jazzy rhythm. Over half of the dancers left the floor and Klaus was able to check many of them out as they crossed in front of his table in search of drinks. Unable to identify the man he hoped to see, he transferred his gaze back to the floor figuring that with fewer people on it he would be able to observe most of the dancers that remained.

His luck wasn't with him tonight because he noticed no one who fitted the description he'd been given, and it was getting late, he glanced at his watch. It was after one. The place was open until three AM, but Klaus expected to be gone long before then.

Casually he watched a pair of tall dancers holding one and other they danced close together, their movements sensual and graceful. The blond had his, or her, arms looped around the other's neck. All he could see of the other dancer was his long dark hair as he nuzzled at the blonde's throat. It was a dance of seduction, and watching Klaus found that he was aroused and that the temperature inside his suit was degrees hotter than the rest of the room.

He downed the rest of his drink in one gulp and at the same time tried to ignore the unmistakable movements of the striking couple on the floor. Reminding himself that he was on the job *and* that this was not the time to be thinking about finding a companion for the night. Maybe later. He lit another cigarette.

"Dorian, I am sorry to have to break this up, but I have to talk to someone."

"My, my, just when it was getting interesting," answered the blond man with a feigned pout. "Who to?"

"I need to talk to that impressive looking gentleman with the long hair." And he turned them around so that Dorian could see. "Over there."

"Him!" his shocked tone gave him away.

"Yes. You know him? Dorian, just what have you been up to?"

"Me? You are the one with the 'meeting'. Can I join you?"

"Could I stop you?"

"No. Probably not."

"Then shall we?" The young man put out his arm and Dorian held on to it for protection. He felt that in this case he might need it.

When they reached Klaus' table Gerald bent down to ask the NATO Major if they could join him.

The black-haired youth who stopped at the table matched the description he had been given of his source. Klaus waved him to a chair and that was when he noticed the tall blond accompanying him. Eroica. Emotions ambushed him and because he was unprepared for it the Major was startled by the strength of his reaction. Klaus wasn't all that surprised by his appearance, he had no idea how the notorious thief always managed to get himself involved in his business, but here he was again ready to meddle in his affairs once more.

His contact leaned across the table and introduced himself, "Gerald, and this is the Earl of Gloria. You two are acquainted?" He asked it as if he didn't believe a word of it.

So that was who he was tonight. Klaus frowned in the blond thief's direction, "Yes." He nodded at him with his habitual disdain. "Dorian."

Dorian smiled a sunny smile that rivaled his golden hair. Klaus couldn't help but be impressed by it. "Klaus darling, you are looking particularly handsome on this warm night."

Warm? It was the hottest night of the year, record breaking temperatures, it was damned near intolerable. It must be the outfit Dorian was wearing, or rather not wearing that kept him cooler. As the sleeveless red T-shirt and black jeans that Dorian wore registered, he took a quick look in the direction of the dance floor. Klaus recognized these two as the couple he watched with such interest only moments before. Another kind of heat swept over him and he hoped that in the smoke-filled darkness they were not able to see the resulting flush of his desire.

Klaus turned to the young man and snapped, "What have you got for me?"

"First, I need to know that I will be safe and that it won't be traced back to me."

The NATO Major glanced pointedly in Dorian's direction.

"I'm not worried about Dorian...." Maybe you should be, thought Klaus, but the other man was continuing, ".....if that's all you can do...."

"I will assure you that, unless absolutely necessary I will not let it go any further."

"He's right, you know. He will keep what he promises," interjected the Earl.

"All right, if Dorian says so. Look, maybe we should go somewhere else?"

Klaus shook his head. "No one can overhear us here."

Gerald licked his lips and Dorian glanced at him curiously. "I could sell this for a lot of money you know, but...."

"But?" Klaus' tone demanded an answer.

"Well..."

"I think what Gerald means to ask, is whether or not you are willing to reimburse him for his trouble," Dorian cut in smoothly.

The Major turned his hard green eyes on him. "Can he speak for himself?"

"Yes, I can. I don't need help." The last remark was directed at the unconcerned blond who was now occupied with twisting a curl of his remarkable hair around a finger. "As I was saying, if you can, I could use the money."

"If it is worth it, I'll see that you are compensated."

"Very well, I can live with that." After pausing to take a breath he continued, "I have occasion to be in hotels quite a lot..." Der Stricher, speculated Klaus. "...and one day last week, I came across documents that were in Russian. It was unusual to say the least so I checked out the rest of the contents of the desk. There was a contract, at least it appeared to be a contract, and that was in English."

"What did it say?" the Major prompted.

"I didn't really understand it, but it mentioned the World Trade Conference, that's why you're here. It's held in Bonn, isn't it?"

"It will be held there one week from tomorrow."

"It said that the person to be hired was to complete his contract by the end of that conference, and that the balance of payment was to be deposited in a Swiss bank account after he carried out his end of the deal."

"Isn't that interesting?" observed Dorian.

"Not enough." Klaus leaned forward. "Was there an amount or do you remember the account number?"

"Payment was to be a half-a-million Deutsche marks. The account number is here." Pulling out a crumpled cocktail napkin he passed it to Klaus, there were numbers written on it in pencil.

"This will help," Klaus said, he glanced at the napkin before pocketing it.

"Also - I don't know if this has anything to do with the other thing, but..."

"Go on, anything may be helpful."

"Well, he used drugs. The Russian I mean. But he had more than a personal supply. A hell of a lot more."

"What kind?"

"Coke. Good stuff. He didn't get it here that's for sure."

"This man, he doesn't know that you have seen any of this?" questioned Klaus concerned. Where drugs were, not to mention the possibility of the KGB, the potential for danger was obvious.

"No. I'm sure he doesn't." But he didn't sound quite as sure as his words suggested. Dorian noticed also and he put a hand on his arm, lightly, attracting his attention.

"Gerald, do you need a place to stay?"

The lovely black haired boy shook his head no but he wouldn't meet the Earl's eyes.

"Klaus?" Dorian was requesting he do something about it.

"If he wants, he can stay with me." He didn't want to deny Dorian anything; that is anything that didn't require him to be near the alluring blond.

"Well?" pushed Dorian.

"If it's not too much trouble?" Gerald answered grudgingly, like someone who was not used to accepting favors.

"Good, that's settled. Where are you staying?" the smiling blond asked the Major.

"I don't think I should tell you that."

"If the Earl doesn't know where I am, I'm not going."

Dorian just raised an elegant brow and his smile widened. He looked like a cat who had just gotten into the cream.

Klaus lit a cigarette before giving in to the demand. The boy might be able to recall some more details, and having him with him *would* be convenient, he would not have to run all over town tracking him down, or worse yet end up having to ask Eroica for help to find him.

"Fine. We will be staying at a NATO safe house. It is on Carnaby street, number 29."

"Thank you, Major. I will be by tomorrow night at eight, to pick both of you up for dinner."

"That, will not be necessary."

"What a fabulous idea!" Gerald smiled gratefully at Dorian. "It's been ages since we have had some time to spend together."

This time Dorian didn't bother to smile a triumphant smile, Klaus knew that he didn't have to, he was just as happy to have maneuvered him into a position where he was forced to spend an evening in his company. He would have plenty of time to rub it in.

"Can I drop you boys off?" Dorian stood up.

"I have my own car."

"In that case I'll say goodnight." He leant down, his blond curls falling around him as he kissed the boy on the lips, making it last. "And," his attention returned to Klaus, "Gute Nacht." He made his way around the table to the German but Klaus had already moved out of reach.

There was no way he was going to let Dorian near him while he was in this state of frustration. He had kept his secret desire from him for this long, and he didn't want to ruin what little of a working relationship he did manage to have with him.

Back at the NATO safe-house Klaus opened the door to the extra bedroom and directed the boy into it. But after one glance inside, Gerald followed Klaus into his bedroom.

"What are you doing in here? I have to make a call."

"I don't have anything, not even a toothbrush."

"Check the bathroom. I will see about the rest when I am done." Klaus picked up the receiver and held it pointedly hoping that the boy would take the hint. He didn't. Instead he wandered around the stark room devoid of any of the Major's personal items.

"You don't like the Earl very much do you?"

Klaus sighed and gave the phone a regretful look as he replaced the receiver. "We get along fine."

"But you don't trust him."

"Sometimes."

"What do you have to do with him?"

"We work together."

"What is it he does for NATO?"

"Ask him." Klaus lit another cigarette.

"I have." So Dorian *does* have some sense after all. "He wouldn't tell me. Playing with a pair of Klaus' cufflinks that rested on the dresser, he added, "You know, you two are a lot alike."

Klaus snorted at that.

"No, I mean it. You both are impossible to get an answer out of if you don't want to tell. You both are incredibly gorgeous and sexy. I'll bet you both always get what you want."

Klaus ignored most of the nonsense but the last forced him to respond, "As long as we don't want the same thing."

He thought about it, "No, I don't suppose that happens very often."

"No." The Major watched the boy as he moved with restless grace around his room. "Can I make that call now?"

"Oh, I'm sorry." Gerald headed for the door. "We can talk later." And with that he left. Not if I see you first, thought Klaus. Gerald was much too perceptive for his own, and Klaus' good. He would have to get rid of him as soon as possible. But did he trust Dorian with the boy? Picking up the phone to place the call to Bonn Klaus wondered what their relationship was. The Earl and the rent boy with a heart of gold? Klaus loosened his tie and wished that it wasn't so damned hot.

Over a breakfast that Gerald made from things that Klaus hadn't even know were there, he was subjected to an examination of intense scrutiny. It was difficult to avoid the soft-seeming hazel eyes that looked at him with knowledge acquired years before he should have even known people like himself and Dorian existed. How old was he really? Sometimes he seemed older than Klaus, then he would do something stupid and Klaus would be reminded that he was just a boy. Was he even over the age of consent?

Last night had been one of Klaus' worst nights in a long time. He couldn't seem to get Dorian out of his mind. Just what was it he had been thinking about? Seeing the charming thief again started the old longing just as strong as it have been the last time he saw him. And that time he almost had given in to Eroica's insistent offers of comfort. The look of desire in the Englishman's blue eyes haunted him for weeks afterward.

Klaus refused to let himself accept what Dorian offered so easily. He didn't need it, or him. He had managed to get along thus far without anyone holding him back and he was determined to continue on as he always did in the past.

"So, what are we going to do today?" inquired the boy breaking into his thoughts.

"I am going to try to find out some more information about our supposed killer. You, are going to remain here and I will arrange for someone to stay with you."

"I don't need a baby-sitter."

Klaus put down his coffee and stood up, "You aren't getting one. He will only keep you alive if necessary."

"Can I read something?"

"Help yourself to the library." Klaus put on his suit jacket and went into the privacy of his own room to call NATO's London office, arranging the final details, so that he could escape this house as soon as possible.

Time passed slowly as they waited for the relief to show up. Klaus read the paper and tried to ignore Gerald as the boy searched for a book that was to his liking.

Eventually he settled down with a copy of The Three Musketeers, he held it in his lap and questioned Klaus instead of reading it.

"I can see that you're very strong and competent, so what do you need the Earl for?"

"I do not need him."

"But you've worked with him?"

"Yes."

"You don't give away much do you?"

Klaus declined to answer that as it was profoundly obvious that he did not.

The bell rang announcing the relief and it was with that very same feeling that the Major extricated himself to answer the door.

Gerald called after him, "When are you coming back? Remember the Earl is picking us up for dinner."

"I could hardly forget. I will most likely return before then." And after introducing the young British NATO agent, Williams, to Gerald, Klaus made his escape.

The office the Major was allotted for use in the West German Embassy was not much larger than a closet. It seemed that his reputation didn't rate very highly here, but it didn't really matter to him. All he needed was a phone and the time to use it. Klaus' contacts were one of his most valuable assets and he knew how to get things done in the most expedient way.

Two hours later he stuck his head out of the smoke-filled office in search of coffee. One of the secretaries volunteered to bring it to him and when she arrived with it she coughed and waved a hand at the gray cloud still hanging tenaciously in the air.

Maybe he was wrong about his notoriety; perhaps it was that he was too well known and for some of his worst habits. Not, he was sure, for his basest tendency. That would be confidential. No one ever need know of his unnatural habits. No one that he couldn't trust knew anything at all. And that was how he wanted it to stay.

Klaus sat back, put his feet on the desk, and lit another of his lethal cigarettes. His vulnerability; that was what Klaus wanted to keep hidden from the world. He could never let another know how much sex - that brief tactile contact with another person -- another man -- meant to him. And he refused to let anyone discover that fact about him. Then they might have a biting weapon they could use against him.

The phone rang interrupting his morbid thoughts; it was Z calling from Bonn with information on the Swiss bank account number. It had been opened for someone under the name of Herbert Sasshofer. Something about that name, it was vaguely familiar, and since it didn't come to him immediately he left it simmer in the back of his mind. If left alone the information generally came into focus without him forcing it. For now, he could go and make use of the Embassy's newest computer system, he wanted to see if it could come up with something that for the moment he couldn't.

Major von Eberbach paused for lunch about one-thirty much to the relief of the computer operators. Klaus had insisted on being instructed in their use and wouldn't leave them alone until he had gotten them to do the searches he required.

Lunch consisted of only a sandwich, french fries, or chips - the ridiculous name they had for them here -, and a mug of beer at a pub down the street. Unfortunately he had forgotten that it was frequented by the staff from all the embassies in the area. Fortunately, it was almost completely empty at this time of day. Klaus wanted some peace and was more than happy to be able to eat in the relative quiet of the pub. Unfortunately eating reminded him that he was having dinner with Eroica.

Dorian. Would his peace of mind always be disturbed by the thought of that incredibly alluring thief? With his unerring perceptions the Earl of Gloria would be the one person most likely to discover his vulnerable spot. If Dorian just once touched him with intent, there would be no way on earth that Klaus would be able to stop himself. With Dorian he would lose control; take him to bed and then the blond would have him as surely as he succeed in capturing everyone he met; his staff, his accountant, God only knew many lovers, and even some of his own agents had fallen under his spell. How easy would it be for Dorian to manipulate him? Klaus didn't intend to find out.

It would be so simple for Dorian to use that knowledge and information against him.

If only, Klaus thought, he could sleep with him once to show him that he could walk away; turn my back on him; prove to him that he doesn't effect me in the least. If only, Klaus laughed at himself, he were that good an actor. But for him to send Dorian away after a night spent in his arms would be like cutting out a peice of his heart.

No, it was much better to continue acting the same way he'd been acting up to now, and steer clear of the troublesome Englishman. His feelings for Dorian must remain his own, no one - especially Dorian - must ever know.

The rest of the afternoon was spent trying to get information about Russian drug connections from the Commission on Narcotic Drugs. That was one of the harder tasks to accomplish, and it was also why he decided to do it himself instead of letting one of his many agents deal with it. Klaus needed something to occupy his time *and* his mind.

On his way back to the house Klaus hoped that things would start moving soon. The sooner he had something concrete to do - the sooner he could return to Bonn.

Arriving back at the house, Klaus managed to avoid Gerald in favor of receiving a report from the agent he'd left for his protection. Nothing eventful happened all day except that the nosy boy had asked a large number of questions concerning the Major. Questions that the experienced NATO agent had refused to answer.

Then Klaus managed to escape from conversation on the pretext that it was time to get dressed for dinner. As he dressed tried to ignore the fact that tonight's ordeal was something that he had managed to avoid so far - facing Dorian for a purely social reason. But for all his apparent resistance Klaus was unable to deny the appeal that spending some time in his company had for him, however much he would have liked to have done so. If only they were going to be alone.

When the boy turned up dressed in an expensive dinner suit he thought to question how and where he had gotten it.

The Earl had it sent round. Of course. Dorian was not the type to forget little things like dress. And it seemed that he had also sent a vase with two dozen red roses in it. It was all there in the report the competent British agent left for him to read. Everything had to have been thoroughly searched before it was taken into the house. Leave it to Eroica to put them to such trouble for something as frivolous as that.

Dorian arrived looking much too attractive for his own good; dressed as he was in a cream dinner suit complete with brocade vest, and a neckpiece tied in a bow and used in place of a tie. He also had a huge red rose in his lapel. With his hair loosely tied back, and pieces of it escaping to frame his face, he appeared to be one of his paintings come to life.

Klaus was captivated. It was becoming harder for him to ignore what he wanted most, he had to remind himself to tear his eyes away from the elegant man.

Dinner proved to be almost unbearable. The irritating Englishman immediately ordered champagne and they drank a full bottle before the food even arrived.

Expecting that the evening would be a trial, Klaus was dismayed to find out that it was not only a trial, but that it was one of the hardest struggles of his life. The latest torture the Earl dreamed up to torment him was to flirt with, smile at, and touch whenever possible the young man who sat at his side. Klaus' meal was forgotten in favor of watching the performance of the other men.

He was made to sit and watch as, so casually, Dorian gave away his favors while every touch was one Klaus hungered for. It was unendurable. But again Klaus prodded himself into remembering that lying in Dorian's arms after the fever between them cooled would give him away as assuredly as if he had shouted his obsession for the exquisite blond from the rooftops.

Dorian had requested the diligent waiter to keep their glasses full, which he proceeded to do with normally commendable efficacy. Klaus lost count of how many bottles were opened and carried away throughout the meal.

At length desert and coffee were brought and at that moment Klaus' attention was focused entirely on Dorian. Even now Klaus couldn't help but admire the slim graceful body of the Earl as he heartlessly flaunted his affair in front of him. Dorian's long-fingered hand continued to flutter suggestively on and off of Gerald's arm.

Gerald's actions, spilling the cream and knocking silverware off the table, eventually caused Klaus' attention to turn towards him. He frowned at the amount of drink he calculated the boy had consumed. Sometime after the second bottle he had begun to talk louder and now he was beginning to attract the attention of the other diners.

The Major leaned over to Dorian to whisper not all that quietly, "Is he even old enough to drink?"

"Yes of course. But apparently he is not as used to appreciating such a good champagne as this one is." Dorian leaned in even closer to whisper in Klaus' ear. "Maybe we should take our leave now, before we don't have a chance to do so gracefully."

Klaus pulled away quickly before Dorian could lay a hand on *his* arm. "That, is the most sensible thing you have said all night."

While Dorian asked for the check, Gerald protested, "The night is still young. Why don't we go dancing? The Carousal is open all night." And then he appealed directly to the other Englishman, "I want to dance with you. You do want to - don't you?" his voice husky with innuendo.

"Of course, darling. But it's time for us to go now." And the Earl helped him out of the chair and to the door.

While they waited for the car to be brought around, Gerald looped his arms around Dorian's neck and hung on.

"That is a disgusting display. Can't you stop him?"

"I am trying." To Klaus it appeared that he was enjoying himself.

The Ferrari was driven up and the valet opened the doors and stood waiting.

"Why don't you help me get him into the back seat?"

Klaus helped none too gently, to deposit the inebriated young man into the back of Dorian small car. After handing the respectful valet a hefty tip he took his position in the passengers seat.

Dorian kept the top down and the fresh air rushing past as they drove revived Klaus, but it caused their burden to pass out.

"He's asleep."

"At least he won't be making any messes in the car, the staff would have been very unhappy." And after a moment Dorian added, "I'm sorry he ruined our evening."

"This was not 'our evening'. I only came along to watch him."

"Are you sure? I got the impression that you were more interested in watching me than your witness."

"You have a very vivid imagination."

"So I've been told. Aren't you even the tiniest bit curious?"

Klaus made the mistake of turning to glare at him. Dorian looked back with mischief sparkling in his blue eyes.

"About what?" Klaus asked coolly.

"About what it would be like to have me make love to you?"

The idea had been about the only thing he could think of all night, and now seeing what he desired most - so close, so willing and ready... "Nothing would disgust me more." But even to his own ears the tone of loathing was missing. There was no bite behind his words. Could Dorian tell?

Eroica just turned away and concentrated on his driving. It appears that he's decided to let it drop and Klaus had no idea why.

At the house Klaus helped Dorian drag Gerald up the steps and into the building. The Major was willing to let Dorian have the pleasure of putting the boy to bed all to himself, but as he tried to accomplish that Gerald woke up and once more clung to the Earl.

"Come in with me," he whispered loudly in a thick voice, "You know that I will do anything for you." Gerald pulled the tie out of Dorian's long hair and ran his fingers threw it. "Anything at all. Just name it." He was attempting to plant sloppy wet kisses on the blond Englishman's neck.

Dorian affectionately tried to discourage him then he gently tried to disengage Gerald's arms from around his waist but he wasn't having any luck. "Come on now. Time for bed," Dorian insisted reasonably.

Instead of having the desired effect it only served as an invitation for the black haired boy to drag him toward the bed. His lips fastened on Dorian's as he pulled the lissome blond down on top of him; both of them falling on to the waiting bed.

Klaus had enough of watching Dorian as he let himself be mauled. Unable to think rationally he grabbed Dorian by the shoulders, pulled him up, and tossed him out into the hall.

"Go to sleep," Klaus ordered the youth as he slammed the door to the room. There wasn't a sound to be heard from inside the bedroom as he turned around to confront the blond.

What he saw caused him to halt in his tracks and stare. Dorian eyes were glazed over, his lips were parted and slightly swollen from the kisses he'd received, he was breathing a bit faster than normal and he stood limply, bracing himself against the wall.

Oh Jesus Marie! Jealously and possessiveness still surged strongly though Klaus and he was unable to stop himself from seizing Dorian's shoulders and pressing him firmly against the wall he met Dorian's smoky blue eyes. Klaus willed him to speak, to make a joke out of this, anything so that he would have an excuse to pull himself away, to deny his actions, something to restore his sanity and induce him to stop. But uncooperatively Dorian remained silent.

Klaus couldn't come up with some excuse quick enough to stop himself from responding to the flicker of lust he saw ignite the warm blue eyes. Without further hesitation Klaus' hands tangled in the incredible golden hair, he bent forward kissed him angrily, expressing his passion and putting into it all his repressed feelings for Dorian.

Shocked into submission the wide-eyed Earl parted his lips welcoming the unexpected contact. Suddenly Dorian's arms were around him holding him just where he always wanted to be.

Klaus attacked with out a trace of tenderness, his tongue forcing entry into that long desired mouth. The overwhelming sensation of Dorian relaxing against him, encouraging the contact was his undoing. It was too late.

Caught up as he was in this desperate passion Klaus remembered with certainty that what he started could only end in disaster, but instead of doing anything to stop it he lingered long and contentedly over the soft yielding mouth.

When he finally pulled back, attempting to steady his breathing, Klaus realized with dread that he was unable to tell if there was more than just longing in those outrageous blue eyes.

Dorian continued to cling to him, dragging in small gasps of air.

Slowly Klaus traced his thumb along that fascinating face, and continued down along his jawline, and Dorian responded by pushing up into the caress. A dreamy smile haunted the blond's parted lips.

Klaus kissed him again, hands holding his head in place, he kissed him deeply proving to both of them the depth of his desire. And Dorian leaned into the kiss with his whole body. Klaus' body was insisting that he find somewhere to take the sensual man - and fast.

Dorian might still be dazed by the suddenness of Klaus' abrupt about-face but he obviously wasn't about to ignore the opportunity that now presented itself.

"Your room?" Dorian asked in a voice that sounded somewhat like his normal one.

Of course he wouldn't pass up this chance, he had always made that very clear. But Dorian's motives didn't really matter to Klaus, not here and now, because Klaus knew that there was no way he could stop himself - not for any reason. His desire was all-consuming, nothing else mattered; it was as simple as that. Nothing mattered other than having Dorian warm and willing in his arms. And here he was expecting him to guide him into his bedroom.

Klaus took his hand and escorted him the short way down the hall, his heart pounded hard in his chest and the sound of his pulse beat loudly in his ears, he closed and locked the bedroom door behind them.

Nothing could intrude now, not unless Klaus could somehow find the strength to restrain himself. But the only thing he wanted at this instant was the feeling of Dorian pressed tightly against him, skin to skin, and to feel Dorian's heart beat faster and just for him. He wanted to make Dorian dance to his touch. He wanted the sultry blond to be his, if only for one night. He was planning on savoring the experience and damning the consequences tomorrow.

Dorian turned to face him. "Do you know what you are doing?" he asked softly, keeping his distance.

And because Klaus felt that his actions earlier spoke for themselves he didn't reply. Feeling that Dorian was much too far away, he held out his hand.

Without hesitation Dorian moved into the circle of his arms and he found himself in the long-desired position of holding and being held in a welcome embrace. Dorian melted against him, after all this was what he had unceasingly said he wanted.

Acting on instinct alone Klaus embraced the coveted sensuality of the lithe body. Waves of lust washed over him threatening to pull him under; nothing that he had experienced in the past had prepared him for this. This *feeling* of being helplessly swept along without control was unwelcome even as it gave him the excuse he needed to stop thinking. Uncaring he sank slowly under the flood of feelings; as long as Dorian continued to kiss him with such passion the world could blow itself to pieces and he wouldn't notice.

Dorian exerted himself and pulling away he rapidly began divesting them of their restricting clothes, pushing Klaus' jacket to the floor and then he paused to remove his own. Pieces of their evening clothes landed in a pile and lay mingled together.

Klaus' only thought was to gratify the hot hardness he felt pressing insistently against his thigh. There was no mistaking the urgent look of longing that darkened the blue gaze. As he stood there with only his soft blond curls as adornment, Dorian was everything he imagined he would be. Klaus felt seared by the heat from his remarkable eyes as they traveled down Klaus' body and finally came to rest on his groin.

Naked, Klaus pulled him on to the neatly made bed and Dorian complied with his wordless direction to lay next him.

A hand came to rest on the back of his neck, and Dorian rubbed there releasing some of Klaus' tension until distracted his fingers detoured to slide playfully into the Major's hair. Klaus responded by drawing him into a demanding kiss, his hands burying themselves into his lustrous golden mane. His hair smelled wonderful. Dorian smelled wonderful.

Dorian's cooperation was whole-hearted and unreserved, he deepened the contact and the kiss, pressing ever nearer.

Enthralled by the incredible feel and smell of the other man in his arm's Klaus wanted more, he pulled the silky, hard body of the sinuous blond under him and holding his head trapped, he rocked his hips sliding against the hot erection that now stabbed into his abdomen.

The night was one of the hottest of the year and they were sweating freely, they slid together slick with the natural lubricant.

Dorian moaned aloud as a corresponding moan formed in his own throat and they strained to get impossibly closer. None of Klaus' previous experiences had prepared him for all his senses going wild. Fire burned along his nerves as he rocked his hips in rhythm with the unbelievable man under him. Klaus left his soft pliant mouth, leaving him to breathe raggedly in his ear as he nibbled his neck and explored fluid muscles tensing under him.

Dorian's hands were busy moving almost roughly on his back, and on to his buttocks where he squeezed and stroked, straining, holding Klaus tighter to himself. For long minutes nothing else existed for either of them. Nothing other than the man who Klaus strove against driving them both to the limits of their endurance and then beyond.

After wanting this for such a long time it was all over much too fast, but Klaus knew that as brief as it had been never had he ever felt anything so remarkable.

Dorian was seeking his eyes trying to gauge his reaction, his eyelids heavy and his eyes soft with satisfaction. Still weak willed but now able to summon a modicum of sanity Klaus hoped that he hadn't given anything of himself away, but he drew Dorian into his arms regardless of what Dorian would think. And closing his eyes on reality, he told himself that he was not yet ready to face the truth. * *

Dorian settled in with a sigh, his head resting contentedly on Klaus' shoulder. Long graceful arms twined themselves around him and Klaus responded by tightening his own hold on enchanting blond knowing as he did, that this was the beginning of the end.

The next morning Klaus knew he must start from the very instant he awoke to deny Dorian. It was his only chance. It was probably too late all ready, but he had to try. He had to try and salvage what he could of his career and his life. A life that had no place for a British Earl or a misguided thief. Disengaging himself from the tranquilly resting blond's arms Klaus moved away to distance himself from the allure he projected even in sleep.

Dorian moved restlessly seeking the warmth that only a few minutes ago had been wrapped around him. The urge to return and claim the soft parted lips almost overcame Klaus, instead he stood rigidly, clutching his clothing to his chest as he rode out the hot waves of longing. It was going to be even worse than he imagined. How in hell was he going to be able to keep Dorian from knowing that his very presence sent him over the edge into madness?

Klaus left to get dressed in the bathroom. Nothing would ever be the same again. Dorian now flavored his world, and nothing would ever again look quite the same as it had before. He knew now that he'd been correct to fear this; it was not the sex but the knowledge that Dorian was more important to him than anyone or anything else that caused him to be afraid. Klaus knew that now he must prove to everyone, especially NATO, that that was not the case.

He went to make himself coffee and as it perked Klaus slammed the cabinet door, profoundly regretting that he could not trust Dorian to keep his secret.

While he was downing his second cup of black coffee, Dorian walked in. He was dressed as best as he was able to be, still in the wrinkled suit from the night before. Dorian leaned against the counter and pushed his heavy hair back from his face with both hands. Klaus wanted to go over to him and bury his face in its silky length and inhale scent of sex mingled with roses that still lingered there.

"You should leave before Gerald sees you," Klaus stated as he turned his back on Dorian. "You - don't want to talk about it," he inquired with a raised brow. He didn't sound surprised.

"No."

"All right, I'll respect that for now, but you do realize that we will have to discuss it eventually."

"Dorian," Klaus asserted harshly, "not now."

"Can't I at least have a cup of coffee?"

"If you must."

"Are you always this gracious to all your overnight guests?"

Klaus made his eyes hard as flint. "No."

"No, what?"

"No, I do not have overnight 'guests'."

"I see," Dorian murmured thoughtfully as he retrieved a mug of coffee. "Then why..."

Gerald came in groaning, "My head."

And Klaus echoed the groan. "I'm am not surprised after the way you acted last night."

"Not used to champagne at all, am I?" And finally noticing Dorian's presence, "What are you doing here?" Then taking in the same outfit as the night before, he remarked, "Well, now I know how you know the Major."

During this exchange Klaus chose to leave the room and went to place his call to headquarters.

"It isn't what you think. Klaus and I were only... I just stayed over because I had too much to drink. It is a long drive back, you know."

Gerald turned from helping himself to a cup of coffee to face him. "Uh huh."

They sat in silence sipping at the strong coffee until Klaus returned. "Go and pack," his comment was directed at the boy. "We will be leaving for Bonn within the hour."

"Bonn? Nobody said anything about leaving the country. I'm not sure that I want to go."

"We will have your payment ready for you when you get there."

He was still hesitating as Dorian added, "But dear, they might be searching for you. You really should go..."

"You would like that wouldn't you? You're just trying to get rid of me."

"That's not at all true. You need the money and you will be safer with Klaus."

"It's Klaus now is it? If I"

"Enough! Go and pack." Gerald took one look at the Major's unrelenting expression and sulkily went to do as he was ordered.

"Wonderful," sighed Dorian.

"You too. Get out."

"If I didn't know you better I would think that you are attempting to be rude just to get rid of me."

"I don't have time for this."

"Then when?"

"I don't know."

"Very well, I said that I would give you the space and I will keep my promise." He picked up his cream silk scarf and ran it through his fingers. "I am sorry - about Gerald I mean. I hope he doesn't give you too much trouble." He headed for the door with Klaus as an escort. "If you want, I could go along..."

"Not a chance."

"I could just follow you..."

"And I am sure that you will, if you want *this* to end here and now."

"So that's the way you're playing it, is it? No, I don't want to end it."

"Fine."

"Good-bye, Klaus."

"Dorian."

At first it was hard for him to assimilate everything he was feeling but Klaus finally realized that now he had a hold over the unscrupulous thief, a tenuous one at best, but it was a lever to use to keep him distant and possibly even obedient.

If only that was what he wanted; for him to stay as far away as possible, only the reality was, that he'd prefer to have him as close as they could possibly get.

Bonn was hot. Well, it was as hot as it ever got. Mostly it was dry and dusty, and now it was very crowded with people from all over the world hoping to take advantage of the changing political climate to buy or sell whatever it was that they needed to unload or acquire. It was a golden opportunity for everyone to make money.

Even the street venders, the shop keepers, and the restaurateurs were making a profit noted the NATO Major as he walked threw the Paulusplatz. The streets here were much cleaner than the London ones, and he remembered just in time not to fling his cigarette butt into the recently swept roadway.

Five days had passed since he discovered the alleged threat to the World Trade Conference. He wasn't much closer now he had been then to finding out who it is that is being targeted for assassination. And he was having a hard time penetrating the assassin alias. That name - Herbert Sasshofer - he just couldn't place it, even after countless hours spent searching NATO's extensive data bases. The computer had come up with a huge list of possibilities and Klaus also had his own mental list, but neither of them were of any real help.

At least his subordinates came up with confirmation that the KGB did indeed hire a shooter. Why they weren't using one of their own Klaus couldn't fathom; they were normally so proud of their assassins. Could it be they hoped to avoid any connection with the murder? Most likely they had no idea that NATO, and consequently the BfV, West Germany's version of a counterintelligence agency, had obtained evidence of that fact.

Thinking about how he acquired that evidence caused Klaus to recall the irritating young man that was at this moment occupying the back bedroom of his Bonn apartment. Thank God, he did not have to spend all that much time in Gerald's company. His agents took turns guarding him and their commander managed to find plenty to keep himself occupied until late into the night. Unfortunately there was no where else to house him; the hotels were all filled with conference attendees, reporters, and all of their staffs. NATO didn't feel there was sufficient threat to the young man to warrant the use of a clean safe-house; in consequence Klaus was stuck with him.

At first Gerald afforded him the silent treatment, which suited Klaus just fine, but soon he realized that that was not the tactic to take with the impenetrable NATO Major, so he had resorted instead to badgering him about his relationship with the Earl. Through it all Klaus maintained steadfastly that there was no relationship and the rest of the time he just ignored him.

No relationship. That was certainly true, but only because he refused to allow himself to contemplate such a monumental step. His whole life - his whole world would change overnight. And it wasn't only admitting that he had a male lover, it was the one he'd chosen. Dangerous, irresponsible and totally unacceptable, that was what Dorian was and what he would always be. Klaus was too practical to expect or even hope that he would change.

The Major walked faster impelled by the knowledge that he only had three days left to the end of the conference. On account of his advance information he had been put in charge of conference security, actually coordinating the security would be more accurate term. He had to deal with the local police, their tactical assault squad, agents from the BfV, and agents from the local branch of the West German Federal Intelligence Service. It galled him to have to spend most of his time in an office dealing with the political aspects of the job. He was no diplomat and he knew it. His chief was probably heartily amused by the position in which Klaus found himself.

Reaching the temporary office he was allocated at the moment Klaus checked in with his also temporary secretary about the calls received in his absence. The efficient older woman informed him that there had been a call from agent A, who was in charge of making sure that the delegates had the proper security; it was flagged as not urgent, a call from Z who was baby-sitting Gerald, and two calls from Gerald himself.

The Major decided to deal with A's problem first. It seemed that while on duty covering the concert hall last night, G had spotted Eroica in the audience.

Oh Hell, Klaus swore to himself, just what he needed. His threat hadn't done much good after all. G had followed him back to the Hotel Königshof but he didn't try to approach him. Leave it to Dorian to manage a room at one of the best hotels even when they have all been booked solid for months. It was G's considered opinion that Eroica had known that he was being followed. Knowing G, Klaus was sure that Dorian couldn't have failed to notice the cute blond agent with whom he was so familiar.

He proceeded to read the reports from agents stationed at the airports without much interest. He believed that, with a German name, requesting Deutsche marks as the payment, the shooter was not likely to be entering the country from very far. In fact his theory was, he was a resident and someone who knew the territory very well. The railway station logs he studied with slightly more care. It would be a fortunate accident if one of the agents on duty there spotted a known assassin entering the country.

Klaus had a feeling that the man they were looking for was a sleeper, or someone who was extremely careful, someone who didn't accept every job that came his way, and he didn't kill for the enjoyment of it. It seemed to the NATO agent that he only emerged when he needed the money.

Klaus buzzed his efficient secretary to request a search be done looking for information on contract-type killings that were committed here in Germany and remained unsolved.

Finally unable to put it off any longer Klaus phoned his apartment and was relieved when it was Z who picked up the phone.

"Report."

"The young man here has remembered^d something else. It might be of some value."

"Go on."

"Well, it seems that he recalled another name, Heinz and the last started with an S, something like Spegal."

"And it was in reference to?"

"He overheard a phone call. The name was the only thing he recognized, the rest of the conversation was in German."

"Good. Z, Eroica is in town. He might come by trying to see the boy. I just thought I'd warn you."

"Thanks much, Sir. Speaking of the boy, he wants to talk to you."

"Well don't put him on. I'll deal with him later."

"Very good, Sir."

He hung up the phone without preamble.

Heinz and something like Spegal? He added that name to the secretary's list of searches that was waiting for her to do.

Klaus wondered if he should seek out Dorian, he wanted to find out what he was up to. But he dismissed the idea immediately. He would have to deal with him soon enough and if he saw him without the distraction of the job, he was afraid as to where such a meeting might lead. Let him come to me, the Major decreed. He would try to be ready for the ambush of longing that came along with his presence. But how was he going deal with the ungovernable fervor he felt at the very sight of him?

The Major's excuse for avoiding Gerald tonight, was that he had to show up at some of the functions that the German and foreign dignitaries were attending. His men were safeguarding them and he needed to check up on their preparations, besides he could always think better on his feet than at a desk.

Dressed in his best evening suit, Klaus observed his men at work before making his presence know to them. At the official reception, A spotted him, but not soon enough for Klaus' exacting standards. Most of the agents from the BfV and the BnD did not, he was definitely going to have a talk with their commanding officers first thing in the morning.

At his last stop, the Beethovenhalle, G noticed him almost immediately. Klaus was impressed with the petite agent's unerring skill at noticing faces. G's detail was once more the concert hall and it was filled to overflowing with more VIP's than music lovers. At intermission all operatives, uniformed and non, positioned themselves where they would appear the most useful. Klaus leaned against the wall of the hallway near the exit to some of the boxes, generally keeping an eye on things. It was there that Dorian found him.

"Why Major, fancy running into you here. Are you enjoying the concert?"

"You know very well that I am working." He crossed his arms across his chest and steadfastly maintained his position against the wall.

"Of course. I should have known, but you are looking too incredibly handsome for work." Klaus ignored the rush of heat caused by the complement. Dorian said those things to everyone. "I don't suppose that you might have a moment of time for us to have a little chat?" And when he didn't reply, Dorian continued, "We can go to my box, it's just across the hall."

"What are you doing here?"

"Are you sure you want to talk about this now?" Dorian glanced meaningfully around at the crowded halls.

"All right," he agreed brusquely. Dorian looked much too good in his well-cut black tux in addition to his shining hair cascading down his back. As he followed him into his box Klaus was horrified to discover that he was afraid to trust himself alone with the obstinate Earl.

"Well?" he snapped. Turning to face him Klaus prepared to shut him out as well as he could but Dorian was behaving himself.

He had settled into one of the plush red seats and answered him gracefully, "I'm here on a shopping trip. Don't frown at me so, I really am. Didn't you know that the Germans make the best steel? I am ordering a new set of throwing knives."

"And?"

"And, I am getting rather low on a number of excellent German wines, the cellar needs constant attention you realize."

"And?"

"And I am having a hard time staying away from you."

"I thought I told you to stay away."

"Did you? I don't recall your asking." He shook his head in mock puzzlement causing his long hair to float around him.

"I don't want you seeing Gerald, and I don't want you interfering."

"Have I done anything? I would like to know how Gerald is fairing but I assure you my interest lays purely with you."

Klaus assumed a pose of idle indifference, his arms once more folded across his chest. Dorian just lowered his eyes - waiting.

Klaus' breath caught in his throat, what a picture he made with his impossibly long lashes resting on his sharp cheekbones. Dorian was not as unconcerned as he tried to appear, he was gripping the arms of his seat, his knuckles white. All Klaus had to do was reach out...
"Dorian."

The blond looked up, hope coloring his eyes. Klaus was unable to say anything else, either to encourage him or to stop him. The next thing he knew, Dorian was in his arms pressing him into the dark corner of the box behind the red velvet drapes. And he didn't care, he was too far gone. Dorian was kissing him with an unmistakable urgency that took his breath away.

When Dorian finally pulled back to stare into his eyes, regarding him with expectations, Klaus held on unable to let him pull away any farther.

"I just wanted to make sure that you haven't forgotten," Dorian whispered a little breathlessly.

"I can't forget." The words were out before he could stop them.

"But you want to."

"Yes. No. I told you I can not deal with this now."

"After the conference is over?"

"Maybe." Dorian attempted to pull away so Klaus added pulling him closer, "All right. Yes. But stay out of my way until then, I have a job to do."

"Agreed. I have rented this box for the rest of the week, if you..."

"I know where you're staying."

Dorian smiled, warming him, "I'm glad."

"I have to get going, G will miss me."

Dorian released his hold, and Klaus reluctantly let him go. "I'm sure he will," he intoned pointedly.

Klaus gave him one last speaking look as he left. How was he going to be able to carry on for the rest of the night without recalling the desperate passion for Dorian that he endured? Three days. Three more days.

He left the building to attend a cocktail party thrown by the delegate from Austria, there at least they always served the best food and drink a man could ask for.

The next morning started out badly. Gerald accosted Klaus before breakfast, before his first cup of coffee, and demanded to know why he was being kept from seeing the Earl. Apparently, Eroica calling him to find out how he was caused him to get all worked up. Then he accused Klaus of being jealous and deliberately keeping them apart.

Jealous. He could be *if* he thought he had something to worry about, and it just might serve to keep him away from Dorian. There was nothing he wanted more than to keep away from Dorian and there was nothing he wanted more than to drag him into the nearest bedroom and for them to stay there forever.

Soon afterward the meeting he called with the commanders of the other organizations went just as badly as he expected. Too many people to cover and not enough manpower to do the job was what they pleaded as an excuse for careless work. The Major once again stressed the importance of their alertness. Major von Eberbach added that they were all good men, it was just the tension that was getting to them and they needed to be reminded to keep on their toes.

At least the reports concerning the night before contained no bad news. Everything had been quiet except for the usual 'diplomatic' incidents; sneaking women into bedrooms or directing them to someone else's, accusations of stolen secrets, an aid quietly gone missing only to turn up a few hours later drunk, the usual.

The thing that claimed Klaus' interest was what the computer turned up on the name Heinz Spegal subsequently; Heinz Spiegelberg alias Hans Shultz. And now apparently he was using Herbert Sasshofer. Klaus loosened his tie, opened his top shirt button, and leaning back in his chair. With a cup of black coffee in hand, he settled back to read the attached biography.

The description was sketchy at best, he was about one and three-quarters meters tall, average, dark blond hair, blue eyes, fair skin, age, about 40-45, no distinguishing marks. An artist drawing was included. He appeared to be an average German only his eyes looked a little bit too small for his face.

It was three years ago that he had last been seen driving away from the scene of a shooting that resulted in the Minister of Commerce's death. An M16 assault rifle, American, with a scope had been found abandoned in one of the building's closets. It had proved to be the weapon used for the murder. There were no fingerprints on it that were good enough to be recovered.

He wore gloves?

Under the various aliases Spegal had been suspected only a small number of times, four to be exact. The author of the report suggested that he was a German native that was now living in East Germany under the protection of the Russians.

That portion rung true, at least it did up to a point. To fit in with Klaus' own theory he needed to still be a resident here on this side of the wall. Klaus put down the reports to light a cigarette. As he smoked, he mulled over what he had learned. Who was he after this time? Someone who threatened the Russian interests? The computer turned up too many possible targets. It would be impossible to cover them all. It was a security nightmare. He needed something else.

After leaving the description and the drawing to be copied and distributed to all organizations concerned, Klaus went to do a quick check on the conference halls to reassure himself that all was well.

That night as the Major made his rounds he found his mind wandering. It was difficult to avoid thinking about seeing Dorian again.

At the concert hall, after checking in with G to see in everything was quiet, he found himself resting against the same wall of the same hall he had occupied the night before. Oh God, has it come to this already? It was much too easy to just stand there and pretend that he wasn't waiting for Dorian to come to him. Not that Dorian wouldn't see through the pose. Nervous as a teenager he lit another cigarette.

At intermission the boxes let out. Ten minutes later Klaus was still waiting, and after the hall cleared he braved the British Earl's box angry that he was the one being forced to seek him out. There was no one there. Disappointed and annoyed, Klaus smoked as his eyes searched the rest of the hall for Dorian's frivolous blond head. Maybe he decided not to attend this evening. But why would he have done that? Doubts that Klaus was unused to feeling nagged at him. What if..? He slammed down hard on that thought.

Sitting down to calm himself he couldn't help but notice that the Earl's box gave him a bird's-eye view of the theater, he decided to stay here for awhile. Somewhere in the back of his mind the idea that Dorian might still show up refused to go away.

Noticing the program left there for the Earl, he picked it up and idly glanced through it. Tonight's selection included a group of Schubert's romantic pieces that Klaus had always been partial to, An Die Musik in particular, and now as it was performed the mellifluous sound of the music reminded him of Dorian. Everything reminded him of Dorian. This was getting him nowhere. He wasted enough time here already. Putting the program into his pocket, he went to finish his round of appointments.

Thank goodness the rest of the night passed without incident, Klaus wasn't sure if he would react with his customary efficiency with his mind centered wholly on what might have happened to Dorian. He had managed to stop himself just short of assigning an agent to go and find out, he was incredibly short of manpower as it was.

It was already well into the morning of the next day when his proper secretary buzzed him to inform him that a Lord Gloria was on the phone and most insistent that he speak to him. Klaus managed to thank her and to say that he would handle it, all in his normal voice. He attempted to summon his usual irritation but all he felt was relief, Dorian was alright.

"von Eberbach."

"I'm sorry that I missed you last night."

"Are you?"

"Very much so. Did you miss me?"

"What do you want?"

"I found out something that I thought I should pass along to you." Klaus kept silent, his silences were easy for Dorian to ignore. "I overheard one of the American delegates, talking to one of the German's about increasing the percentage of 'hardware' that was being imported for military use. I figured that meant either weapons or computers, so I decided to see if I could find out some more about it."

"You shouldn't be doing this. Why didn't you let me know?"

"I really didn't have anything at all, did I? Well, I decided to follow the American around and see what I could find out. I must say he was extremely adept at avoiding all my questions."

"He didn't try to get rid of you?"

"Actually, I think he rather fancied me and was hoping that something might 'develop'."

"I don't want you getting involved in any of this."

"I already am. Why, don't you trust me?"

"Dorian.."

"Don't you want to hear the rest of it?"

"Get on with it."

"He was carrying a gun."

"That's because he is probably CIA." Here to make a private deal. "What's his name, I'll have him checked out."

"Ronald Carman." Klaus wrote it down.

"And the German?"

"Herr Bresser. I didn't hear the first name. One more thing, the American will be a guest of his at the symphony this evening." And after a pause he added, "Will I see you there tonight?"

"Yes."

"I love it when you're enthusiastic. Ta, ta, until tonight, my darling." And he hung up saving Klaus the trouble of forming a reply.

The first thing the Major did was to add the names to his secretary's list and then he got his men on it immediately, he wanted to know everything about those two men down to what kind of underwear they wore.

Most of the American supplied weapons were normally funneled in through NATO. Why weren't these? Funding some private army? Against the Russians? East Germans? It just didn't add up. But as possible targets the two of them just moved to the top of his list.

Klaus picked up the folder on Herbert Sasshofer, and reread the information he had on his background. Age 40-45. That was young enough not to have been directly involved in the war, but what about his father? Klaus searched for the required data. Herman Sasshofer, probable not his real name, was a registered Polish Nazi. He had been executed in Poland before the Russians took over control.

It was possible that the arms were for the Polish underground. Which would be why they weren't being funneled in through NATO. They couldn't be seen taking such an obvious position as that would indicate. Now all he needed was confirmation that Herr Bresser was acting as a liaison for the Polish underground.

And that the American was working for the CIA. It was only courteous behavior for 'the agency' to inform NATO of all agent's working in the same area, and NATO reciprocated so as not to interfere with each other's cases. After all they were on the same side. But Klaus knew he had only been notified about one CIA operative working on an entirely different matter. He couldn't wait to find out if he had a good reason to give the other agent a hard time.

Tonight all the agents he met with seemed edgy. One arrest had already been made. Klaus was sure that he wasn't the man they were after but it was just as well that they were able to keep him locked away for the next few days. The night was hot, and he could feel the tension in the air, something was going to happen. There were only two days left in the conference. Only two days left for the shooter to complete his contract.

His assignation with Dorian was postponed until after he interviewed the suspect. Even so, it wasn't much after interval that Klaus found himself sneaking into the Earl of Gloria's box.

Dorian stood up right away, he seemed certain of his welcome. As Klaus advanced, arms encircled his waist and Dorian pulled him into the shadows at the back of the box.

"You are the most..." Klaus started, his arms were also wrapped around Dorian's slender waist.

Apparently realizing that what he'd been about to say was not complementary, Dorian interrupted, "Yes darling, I know very well what I am." He dropped his voice even lower, "And what I want to be."

The statement unbalance Klaus enough for him to question with a growl, "What's that?"

"I want to be yours."

Unable to answer him with words Klaus drew him closer, tighter, crushing him. Dorian was kissing him insistently and Klaus kissed back giving him what he requested. Responding to Dorian had become a habit and it was unbelievable that he had become accustomed to it already. It was also at this time Klaus noticed that he was able to think more clearly when he knew where Dorian was and what he might be up to, his attention was diverted only when he had to worry about him. It wasn't the distraction of his presence that caused his thoughts to continually return to him instead of the job at hand, it was, well, it was because he missed him.

Klaus pulled his head away to ask, "What the hell am I going to do with you?" He hands played with the honey colored hair in the middle of Dorian's back.

"Being as clever as you are, I'm sure that you will think of something." Dorian stroked his face as he added wistfully, "Two more days."

Klaus turned his head to kiss the palm of the caressing hand. "Mum. You had better let me know what you are up to from now on."

"Yes?"

"Otherwise I might just do something foolish. You don't want that to happen now do you?"

"I don't want anything unfortunate to happen to you."

"I just want to know where you are."

"You did miss me!"

Klaus gave in; if it would save him peace of mind, "I missed you."

"I love you, you do know that don't you?" his tone was matter-of-fact.

Klaus just tightened his hold on him, it was too soon. And he had to leave. He put a finger on Dorian's lips to preventing him from insisting on an answer. "Behave yourself," he ordered. And then he left.

From the other side of the theater the Major could just barely see a bit of the golden hair in the box he had just left but he knew he was there.

Klaus was attempting to keep an eye on the two men that Dorian alerted him to, he was waiting for an opportunity to have a quiet little talk with the CIA agent who was going by the name of Ronald Carman. Klaus now had possession of his real name, Dick Steward, and it had taken Klaus a hell of a lot of digging and a few favors called in to accomplish his self-imposed task to acquire that fact. Even now he had been unable to get the entire story out of his contact, but it was more than enough for the NATO Major to speculate on the rest.

Luck was with him, the CIA agent left the box and headed straight for him.

"Leaving so soon?" Klaus asked in English as the man tried to pass him by.

"I beg your pardon?"

"Aren't you enjoying the performance?"

"Do I know you?"

"No, but you should. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Major Klaus Heinz von dem Eberbach."

"Major?"

"I would like to have a word with you." He made as if to take his elbow and to steer him into a storage closet.

"I'd rather not."

"I'm sure that you wouldn't want to disappoint NATO, now would you? After all we are on the same side, aren't we? I'll just need a minute."

"Do you have an ID?"

Keeping up the act Klaus answered, "Of course, how thoughtless of me." Klaus then presented his identification. The brown haired man would be at a disadvantage when he glanced down at it. Klaus could see it made him nervous.

"Alright," he agreed as he handed it back. "But just a minute."

Klaus prevented himself from showing a triumphant smile. The man was young and good-looking in a clean cut sort of way. Not Dorian's type at all.

After ushering him in ahead of himself, Klaus shut the door turning his back to him deliberately letting the other agent know that he was not afraid of him. He turned back slowly and was the first to speak, "I am in charge of security for this conference. There is a contract killer out there after one of the delegates."

"What has this got to do with me?"

"Well, Dick, I have reason to believe that your 'contact' is a possible target. If your deal doesn't go through it will be to the shooter's and his employer's advantage."

"Who do you think I am? Whoever it is you have the wrong man."

This time Klaus did smile, "If that is so, then I will have to inform the American Embassy that a man impersonating a CIA agent named Dick Steward is running around making arms deals in their name."

"I'm leaving."

"That's fine, I'm finished. Just remember that NATO doesn't appreciate being kept in the dark about agents operating in their territory. My home territory. You will let them know that, won't you?"

The man brushed passed him on his way out because the Major refused to move out of his way. Klaus paused to enjoy the moment awhile longer. That was the most fun he'd had in ages.

The rest of the evening past in relative quiet, once again his assassin didn't show.

The next day's reports confirmed his guesses. Now all they had to do was figure out where and when Herbert Sasshofer was likely to strike. There were only two days left for him to fulfill his contract. The Major already had a schedule of Herr Peter Bresser's planned activities for the day. He was to be covered every step of the way. It appeared that he was also planning on attending the concerts for the next two nights.

Klaus called a briefing to update all parties involved. Now everyone would know what he knew; including the fact that there was a CIA agent working their area without the usual 'cooperation'. That ought to keep Dick on his toes.

Afterwards he held back his own agents to inform them that Eroica was also involved and to keep an eye on him. That was the best he could do. It was never easy to keep Dorian out of trouble if he went looking for it. Klaus knew he was just going to have to learn to live with the reality of the situation.

All day he was kept busy receiving hourly reports and the continuing checks on the other possible targets kept him occupied for the rest of the afternoon and well into the night.

Darkness once again found him on watch at the Beethovenhalle. Only this time his position was outside of Herr Bresser's box instead of Dorian's.

Intermission was almost over and most people were heading back to their seats when G radioed him. The agent informed his superior that he thought he saw a man answering the description of their suspect entering the theater and heading up the stairs to the boxes. G had lost him in a crowd of milling identically dressed delegates while they returned to their seats.

Klaus directed him to pass along the information to all the other agents on duty. Pocketing the radio he entered the box who's door he'd been guarding. The gentlemen seated there turned, questioning his entrance, and Klaus paused to explain all the while searching the rows of boxes opposite. "I'm with security. Don't be alarmed. I just need to get a better view of the theater. Please stay seated." As the men settled back Klaus noted that the American agent had opened his jacket giving himself ready access to his weapon. Klaus' gun was already loose in his holster.

After some time passed uneventfully the other occupants of the box began to relax. As the concert resumed Klaus noted with annoyance that Dorian's box was empty. Where could he have gotten to? He had been there earlier when Klaus had checked. Three boxes down from the Earl's, in one that previously had been deserted, he caught a glimpse of movement. The Major called his men requesting they check the boxes on the north side of the theater. This time before he'd even finished the call Klaus saw a flash coming from the same box as something caught the light.

Klaus' gun was out, "Down," he shouted and Dick pushed Herr Bresser to the floor and lay covering him, his gun also drawn. Klaus was taking careful aim at the figure of the gunman now visible as the shooter in turn sighted the box the Major now stood in. Before the NATO agent could get off a shot he spotted a golden-blond head coming up behind Sasshofer. Nein. Gott, Dorian, nein! Preventing himself from shouting his thoughts aloud Klaus watched Dorian throw himself at the hired killer knocking the rifle aside even as it went off.

The bullet whipped by Klaus' ear and buried itself harmlessly in the back wall of the box. Not having a clear shot Klaus was forced to observe Sasshofer butt Dorian with the gun causing him to double over and then he used it to hit the blond man over the head. Dorian dropped like a stone and didn't return to Klaus' view again. Klaus felt like he'd been shot. Reacting instinctively to the attack as the pain clutching at his heart tightened, he retaliated by firing off a shot in Sasshofer's direction and continued until the clip was empty. But even as he did it Klaus knew his automatic wasn't powerful enough to reach his target with any force. Anyway the bird had flown. Klaus was out of the box, trusting the CIA agent to stay and protect his own contact, he ran as he reloaded, heading around the back of the building towards the service stairs.

Swearing to himself all the while, Klaus slowed carefully rounding the corners only after checking first. He pulled out his RT and snapped, "G, what's your position?"

"Major. We are on the north side heading for the back stairs."

"I am approaching from the south. Same position. G, Dorian's down. Get him some help."

"Already on its way."

"Thanks. See anything?"

"He's been here, we have another man down. The officer that was guarding the staircase. He's been shot, close range."

"All right I'm going down. Get someone at the bottom of that staircase. von Eberbach out."

Now that he knew the man was still armed, and that he didn't have to worry about one of his own agents getting in his way, Klaus moved quickly and quietly down the flight of stairs. At the second landing, that led to the balcony seats, Klaus paused. If Sasshofer had continued on to the next floor he would have been informed. And most likely he would already have been caught.

Klaus opened the door and peered around, first to the left then to the right. Everything was quiet. If Sasshofer managed to get back to the audience side and hide there, he was going to have a hard time finding him. But the assassin couldn't get out of the building, not with his agents covering the exits. His only chance would be to fight his way out past them. It appeared that was exactly what he intended to do. Klaus was now his first obstacle.

The Major moved to the end of the corridor and carefully peered around the corner. Again nothing. Moving on to the next bend Klaus once more took a quick glance. There was no sign of him. He turned right and circled back around checking any doors he came across as he went. All of them were locked. He was almost back to where he started from when he noticed a man with hair a shade darker than blond, wearing a tux, leaning against the wall with his back towards him. Sasshofer. It had to be. He was lying in wait for him to come out of the stairwell. Klaus must have gotten past him when he went to check the main staircase.

Now Klaus had the advantage, he was the one behind the gunman. Klaus aimed for the center of his back, and in his most deadly voice he ordered, "Drop it!"

The man raised his hands slowly, the gun still clutched in his right hand. "I said drop it, Sasshofer! Now." As he let the gun fall from his hand Klaus' trained eyes didn't follow it down. "Kick it over here." The tawny-blond haired man obeyed. "Now turn around."

As he started his turn Klaus registered a hand descending and as Sasshofer finished the move his hand contained another gun. Klaus instinctively dropped to one knee as he fired a split second before the other man. Sasshofer's bullet went wide as he was propelled backwards and went down. Klaus stood up and kicked the other man's gun out of his reach. "I guess I forgot to tell you to turn around slowly."

"Major?" G inquired from his radio.

"Everything's under control. Get a medic and get down here."

"Yes, Sir."

Klaus took off his white silk scarf; folding it he used it as a pad and pressed it against the wound in the assassins chest. Once G arrived on the scene he would be free to go and inquire about Dorian. That stubborn fool, what if he'd... Thinking about Dorian made it easier to ignore the man bleeding to death on the floor.

"Major," G arrived and pulled him aside.

"Yes? What is it?" Klaus was impatient to talk to the medics.

"Eroica's been removed to Johannes. I'm sorry Sir, but he hasn't regained consciousness."

"I see." What was it that G thought he knew? He was the most observant of his agents and both of them had been here every night. "Any problems?" Klaus asked as a distraction.

"No, Sir. The officer, that was shot, was only wounded. A is on his way to take charge. I thought you might..."

"Don't think. I will finish what I started." The hospital Dorian had been taken to was just 300 meters away. He could walk to it in under ten minutes.

One of the medics turned from working on the gunman, he signaled G and they moved off a bit. "He won't make it to the hospital."

Klaus bent over the fallen man, "Sasshofer, do you want to tell us anything?"

"He killed my father."

"Who? Bresser?"

"Yes. He was a traitor."

"Were you working for the KGB?"

"I..," he was having a hard time breathing.

"Yes?" prompted Klaus.

"Major K..."

"That's enough," said the medic firmly. Klaus moved down the hall to confer with G.

"Was he talking to you?" G asked.

"No. I don't think so. He has no idea who I am. It might be the name of the Russian officer, his contact in the KGB."

A showed up then and the competent agent took charge. All of sudden the Major found that all his duties had been relieved by one or another of his agents. There wasn't anything left for him to do. With determination his thoughts returned to Dorian.

Once again the Major pulled G aside. "If anyone is looking for me I will be at the hospital."

"Yes, Sir," was all he replied but Klaus imagined that he gave him a knowing look as he walked away.

Dorian had sustained a concussion and two cracked ribs. He was alive and he would live. Klaus was allowed a brief look in on him only because the doctor was a NATO one and the Major managed to convince him that Dorian was his responsibility and that he was concerned about him.

Klaus stayed around for as long as he could hoping that he would wake up and he would be able talk to him. But what he was going to say he hadn't the slightest idea.

He decided to leave sometime after half of Eroica's staff showed up and repeatedly questioned him about what had happened to the Earl. It appeared that they held him responsible for the Englishman's safety. That was ridiculous. Dorian did what Dorian wanted to do. He never had any control over what the defiant blond decided to do. And now it seemed that Klaus had even less influence than before, Dorian apparently thought that he could do whatever the hell he wanted and come out of it unscathed.

Returning the next morning, Klaus contrived to be admitted before visiting hours. Dorian was awake.

Klaus moved nervously about the small room desperately wishing for cigarette but he knew that he didn't dare light up in here.

"Klaus? Don't pace, you're making me dizzy. Come sit here." Dorian indicated the chair at the bedside.

Klaus sat, he didn't know what to do with his hands so he crossed his arms. "You are going to be all right."

Dorian smiled gently up at him. "Of course I am."

"You are impossible."

"And you love it."

"Yes, I suppose I do. What made you do it? That was a very foolish thing to attempt."

"I saw him returning to that box. He was wearing a pair of white gloves. No one else was, it was unusual so I followed him." Dorian paused to swallow, "He was aiming at the box across the way and when I saw you, I just couldn't stop myself." Klaus took his hand as he faltered. "I thought he was going to kill you," his voice, heavy with emotion.

Klaus pushed his hair off his face with his free hand and paused to rub a thumb along his temple. "That's a nasty lump."

"I'm sorry that I won't be able to keep our date."

"What?"

"After the conference," he reminded him.

"Ah. I am not going to let you out of it that easily."

Dorian laughed, "Oh, that hurts." After he was able to catch his breath, "The doctor said that it might be a month before these are healed." He was holding his ribs.

"If you think that hurts, wait until NATO gets ahold of you."

"For what?"

"To make sure that you are good enough for me."

Dorian tried hard to keep from laughing again. "Why?"

"I told them - about us - that is if you still want there to be an us?"

"I'll always love you."

"Well then, they have to clear you and make sure that you're not a security risk."

"Are you asking me to be on my best behavior?"

"You do what you think is best." Klaus stood up and resumed his pacing. "I need a cigarette."

He went to the door and paused as Dorian asked, "Are you coming back?"

"Always." And he left.

That had been much harder than he thought it would be, and he still wasn't sure that Dorian knew how serious he was about all of this. Dorian was always much too frivolous about important things for his liking. How was he ever going to be able to trust him?

The cigarette helped some, it calmed him down and helped him to think. Maybe if he did something to prove to him that he meant what he said?

Klaus left the hospital for a walk in the busy city streets. It was the last day of the conference and he still had a job to do. If they eased up now, who knew what kind of nut might come out of the woodwork? And, if the Russian's were notified that their man failed, they might just have someone ready and waiting in the wings for another try.

By the time Klaus returned to the hospital that evening it was well after eight and visiting hours had already come to a close. He crept into Dorian's room. It was in darkness and Klaus thought that he must be asleep. Just as he was leaving his present on the end table, his name was called.

"Klaus? Is that you?"

Somehow it was much easier in the dark to go and take his hand. "Yes."

"You came back."

"I said I would," he sounded indignant at having his word doubted.

"I thought that you were only going to have a cigarette? If you disappear every time you need a smoke I'll... I don't know what I'd do."

"They have got you on pain killers?"

"Yes. To help me sleep. I don't want to sleep."

"It will be all right." Klaus stroked his soft hair. "I'll come back in the morning. All right?"

"Hum... that's nice."

"Do you want me to bring you something?" He noticed that the room was filled with flowers that hadn't been there this morning.

"Just your gorgeous self," came the sleepy murmur.

Klaus kissed him softly on the lips. "Pleasant dreams," he whispered. Dorian was asleep before he closed the door.

Morning was hot and dry and Dorian was uncomfortable under his wrapping of bandages. The morning visiting hour brought Gerald who had managed to convince G to drive him over to see the Earl.

"Sorry I didn't come sooner but I just found out last night what had happened to you." He tossed a resentful glance in G's direction.

"Well it's good to see you now, Gerald. What have you been up to?"

"Not much at all, they wouldn't let me out of the flat."

A opened the door and after a quick glance around he came in. "The Major, isn't here?"

"No, I haven't seen him at all this morning," Dorian answered with a slight pout.

A gave a G meaningful look and G shrugged.

"So you had to go and save his life," Gerald started.

After clearing his throat A said, "Well, not exactly."

"Whatever do you mean?" G was shaking his head in warning but Dorian wasn't going to let A off the hook that easily. "Go on."

"He wasn't aiming at the Major, the bullet missed him by that much." He held his two fingers about ten centimeters apart."

"Oh, my God.."

"Don't worry," said G as he gave Dorian a consolatory pat on his arm, "We know that you wouldn't want to harm a hair on his stubborn head."

"You know? You *all* know?"

"Well.. yes."

"You're not going to tease him about it or anything?"

"What and risk life and limb?" teased A.

"No, our Major would not like to think that we have all been discussing him behind his back. Anyway, I think he knows."

A appeared horrified, "He knows - that we know?"

"I think he figured it out when we arranged, very neatly I might add, for him to be able to have the time to come to the hospital."

"Then he *is* serious," said Dorian thoughtfully.

"He will never mention it," added G.

"He would rather shoot himself in the foot," threw in A.

"What's this?" Gerald questioned as he picked up a crumpled folded pamphlet.

"I have no idea, it wasn't here last night. Let me see." Gerald did as he was asked and handed it to the Earl.

It was a copy of the program from two nights ago, the concert he had missed, it listed the Schubert selection's that had been performed that evening. Inside written in Klaus' bold script were the words, "The music made me think of you, and I wished that you were there, Klaus."

Whatever it was that Dorian had been hopping for, this was so much more than he ever expected. It was the most romantic, beautiful thing Klaus had ever done. As a matter-a-fact it was the only thing he'd ever done, it made it all that much more special, and Dorian cherished the words as he held it to his heart.

"What's the matter?" Gerald asked even though there was a considerable smile on Dorian's face.

"Nothing, nothing at all," he answered dreamily.

Outside in the hospital corridor Major von Eberbach heard voices in Dorian's room. Not his staff again, he moaned to himself. But recognizing the sound of G's voice he breathed a sigh of relief, although he still didn't want to face Dorian in front of his agents, anything was better than James. Upon hearing Gerald's voice he decided that a smoke and a cup of coffee in the waiting room would be in order.

Gerald, tired of being ignored by the Earl announced that it was time to leave. G just smiled his farewell to A and to Dorian as he was practically dragged out of the door by the boy.

"You were in such a hurry to get here and now.. you can't wait to get home."

"If by home you mean England, you're right."

"We have got you booked on the next plane out."

"That's just great.. Oh bloody hell..."

"What is it?" G was instantly alert, his eyes searching for a threat.

"That's him. The Russian. The man I slept with.."

"Come on." G grabbed his arm and pulled him into the nearest room.

Klaus heard G and the boy leaving Dorian's room, he had been planning to wait until after they left before going in but Gerald's exclamation got his attention. He started down the hall just as A came out of Dorian's room towards him. The Russian was now between the two agents.

Klaus drew his gun. A, who had been about to call out to the Major, trusted that his superior had a good reason to do so and pulled his own weapon.

"Stay right where you are," Klaus instructed. Instead of obeying, the Russian agent turned figuring that Klaus would not shoot him in the back, and was faced with A pointing his Browning at him from the other end of the corridor.

"Just take it easy, Major," Klaus said hazarding a guess, "Easy... Raise your hands." As he spoke both agents were moving in slowly and cautiously. The man complied, keeping his hands where Klaus could see them. "That's good. A, get his gun."

A expertly frisked him and removed his gun from the holster. Klaus moved in then and pushed him against the pristine hospital wall. "G?"

"Right here."

"Your cuffs?" G stepped up and cuffed the man the Major held tightly against the wall. When he was secure Klaus turned him around.

"What an unexpected surprise. Major K....?"

The Russian declined to answer. Gerald stuck his head out of the room G had dragged him into. "You!" hissed the Russian and he struggled to break out of G and A's grip.

"You will want to talk to us later. Now that you will be on the bottom of the list to be traded." The Russian made a face. Things fell into place and realization dawned, so Klaus added, "Or if you were acting on your own?" He watched the minute changes in the other agent's face. "Then that might move you to the top of the list?" Then to his men, "Take him in."

After moving down the hall a bit, A halted the little group and he returned to the Major.

"I forgot in all the excitement, I came to give you this." He handed over a computer printout that contained the results of the search Klaus had requested yesterday. "They said that you wanted it right away."

At the same time he watched his agents escorting the Russian out, he unfolded the report. It contained a list of names and description of KGB officers that might be involved in the assassination plot of Bresser. Not quite halfway down was the name of Major Alexis Karloff. Klaus laughed to himself, better late than never.

"Klaus?" Dorian was leaning against the door frame of his room.

"What the hell are you doing out of bed?" Klaus grabbed him and supported him back into the room.

"What was all the commotion about?"

Gerald rushed past them and into the room, as Klaus helped Dorian back into bed. Klaus had just about managed to forget all about him, until now.

"It was awful. That Russian, you know, the one I slept with, he tried to kill me."

Dorian turned a questioning look on Klaus.

"It appeared that he was after Gerald or maybe it was you. We will find out in the interrogation." Gerald's presence prevented him from comforting Dorian the way he would have liked. "No shots were fired. Everyone's fine."

"Excuse me, Major." Agent C came in the open door, "A called me and asked me to escort the boy to the airport."

"The airport! I have to go and get my stuff."

To agent C, Klaus said, "If there is time take him by my apartment first."

"Yes, Sir."

"Well this good-bye, Dorian. Please come and see me when you get back." He bent down to give him a kiss on the cheek under the watchful eye of the Major.

"Take care, dear. I will ring you."

"Major, its been fun." He shook his hand. "Let's not do it again soon." And then they were alone.

The silence stretched unbroken. Even though being alone with Dorian was what Klaus had been hoping for all morning, now that they were, he didn't know where to begin.

"Thank you for the lovely gift." He turned to find Dorian hugging the program he had left for him to find. "Klaus, sit down." He did. "It was very sweet." And when Klaus still didn't answer he continued, "Although next time I have my ribs broken, I would prefer it if you would spend a lot of time picking out something that fits my sparkling personality and ..."

"You are.." he sounded angry.

"Yes?" he asked, never one to back away from a challenge.

"Beautiful."

Dorian reached up and with his arms looped around Klaus' neck he pulled him down. "Can't help but worry, you do realize that?"

"And I was serious when I said I need to know where you are. No disappearing for a side trip to another country."

"Can you tell me where you are?"

"Not always."

"Then I suppose that we are both going have to learn to live with it. If you want to?"

"Everyone already knows so I guess that I will have to go through with it." To soften his words Klaus kissed him lightly.

"Uh, huh. Self-sacrificing aren't you. I can tell you hate it."

"Maybe if I try it again?"

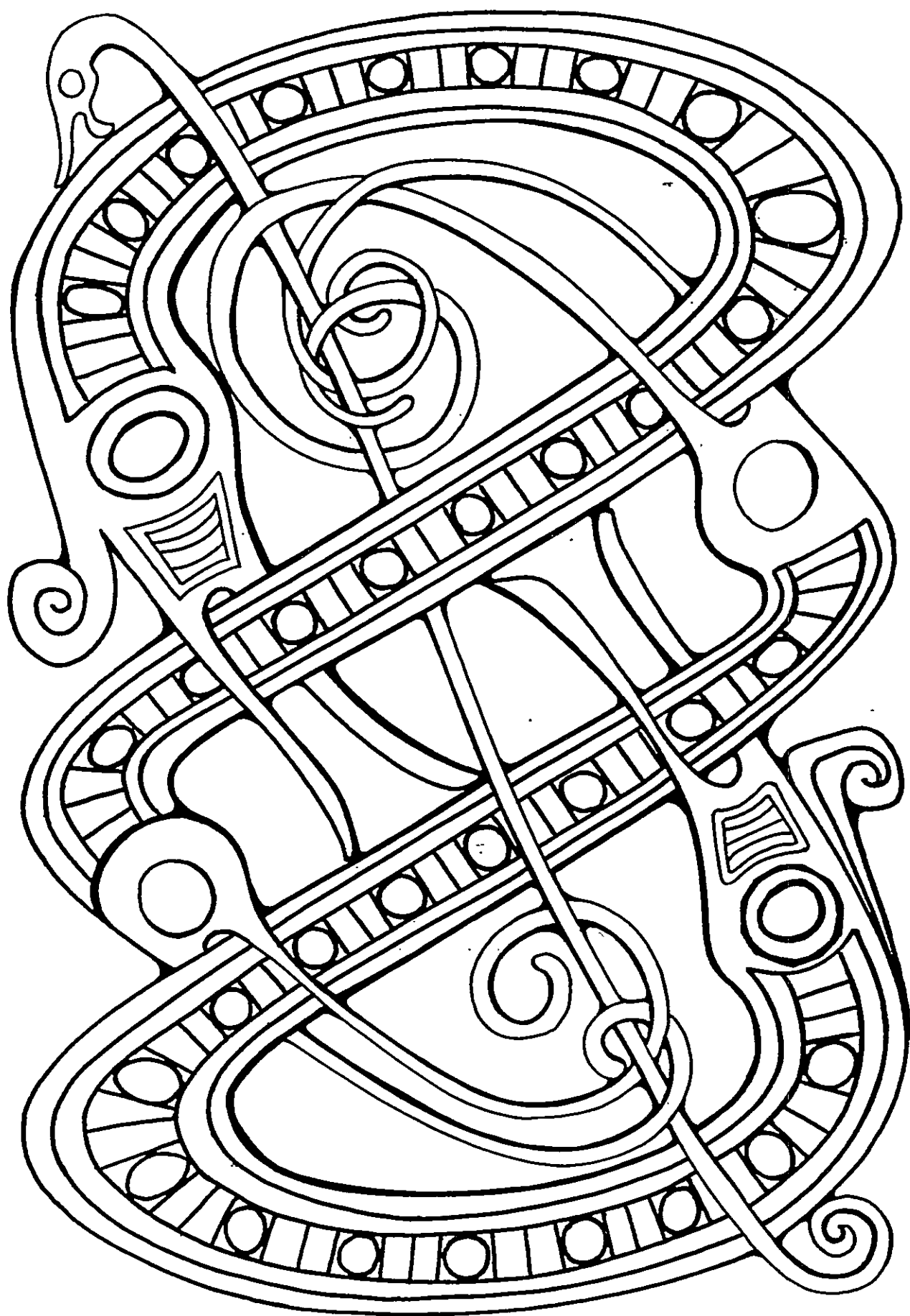
"Practice never hurts." Klaus held on tightly making his ribs ache.

"Will it ever stop hurting?" he whispered so softly that Dorian almost missed it.

"I don't know. It hasn't yet."

In silence they clung to one and other. At least they had the time to find out.





Nicolai's Lament

by *Corbeau*



Deep sleep into day.
The sun comes out
to dark I go in.
Deep sleep into day.

I feel its presence
waves of heat rising around
seeking a way in.
Inside,
I am cool.
I am safe.
I am trapped.

Four impenetrable walls surround me.
Keeping back the fire
Keeping back my death.

To see the sun -
I dream.
To feel the sun -
I hope.
To greet the sun -
I pray.

As the rays grow brighter
I fade and dim.
Higher it rises
as I go down into slumber
alone.





Demon

By Paige Garnett

The steady rhythm of the windshield wipers and the thrum of the tires lulled Ray into slumber. Suddenly the car swerved and came to an abrupt stop. Ray woke startled when first he slammed into Bodie's arm, then the car door and finally the dashboard.

"What the hell, Bodie!"

"Truck in front of me nearly hit something. You okay? At Ray's nod, Bodie continued, "Stay here, I'm going to check on it."

Ray winched as he stretched his abused arm. He wasn't really hurt, the seat belt prevented him from any real damage. It was the fact he had been relaxed and unaware that his body had gotten tossed around.

Bodie came running back in the pouring rain carrying what looked like a dirty rag. He put it down on the floor by Ray's feet and after turning on the inside light, leaned over the back seat and started digging for something on the floor. The 'rag' moved closer to Ray's leg and he jerked away.

"Bodie, what is this?"

Bodie turned back clutching a soft cloth.

"It's a dog, Ray," he replied sounding exasperated.

Ray looked at the dirty mound again, "Are you sure?"

"Of course," his partner answered as he wrapped the shivering soaked creature in the soft cloth. "He's frightened and drenched, poor little fella. I don't think he was hit, but he probably should be checked."

"Bodie, what do you intend on doing with him?"

Bodie had continued to blot dry the dog. "Take him to a veterinary, of course."

"It's after midnight."

"Well since, I don't think he's really injured, it can wait til morning. He's just shaken up from the near miss, but he does look like he's been on his own for awhile. There now you're a lot drier," he whispered softly to the animal as he put the dog back at Ray's feet. "I'll turn the heater up so you get warmer."

Naturally the dog sought more solid warmth which happened to be Ray's leg. A wet cold mound of white fur is not one of the most pleasant sensations.

Ray yelped, "Bodie, its wrapped around my leg and it's still filthy and wet."

"All right, you drive, I'll take care of the little fella." He opened the door and walked around the car and opened the passenger's door.

"Well shove over, it's still pouring."

Ray struggled and shifted over to the driver side. He put the car in gear and maneuvered back onto the road. Out of the corner of his eye, he watched Bodie wrap the shivering dog in the car blanket and hold it on his lap.

"He'll get you all wet," Ray said.

"Doyle, I'm already soaked, what difference could it make?"

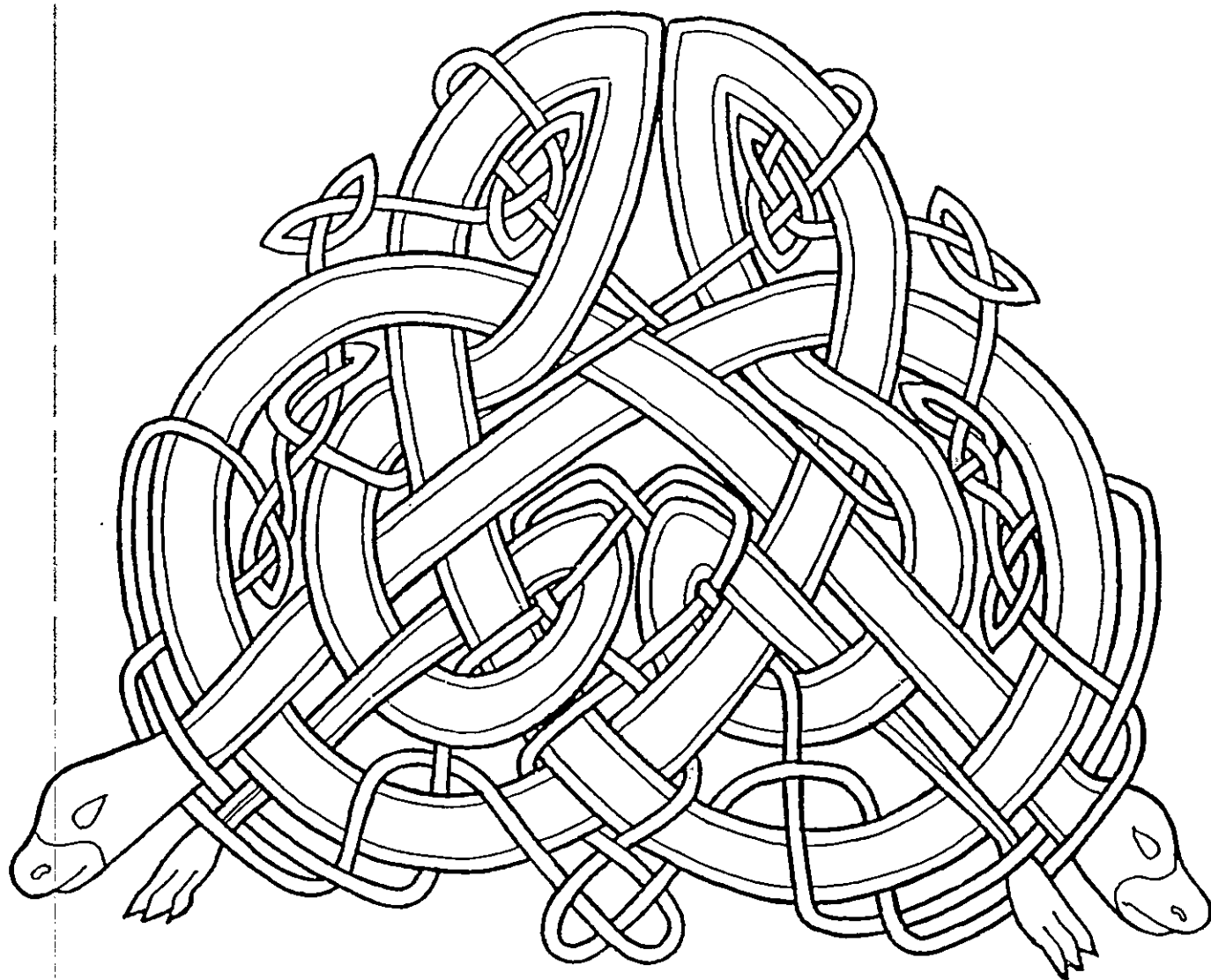
"Right, sorry," Ray apologized suddenly feeling himself in the wrong. "Ah, thought you didn't like dogs?" After he said it, he wished he hadn't.

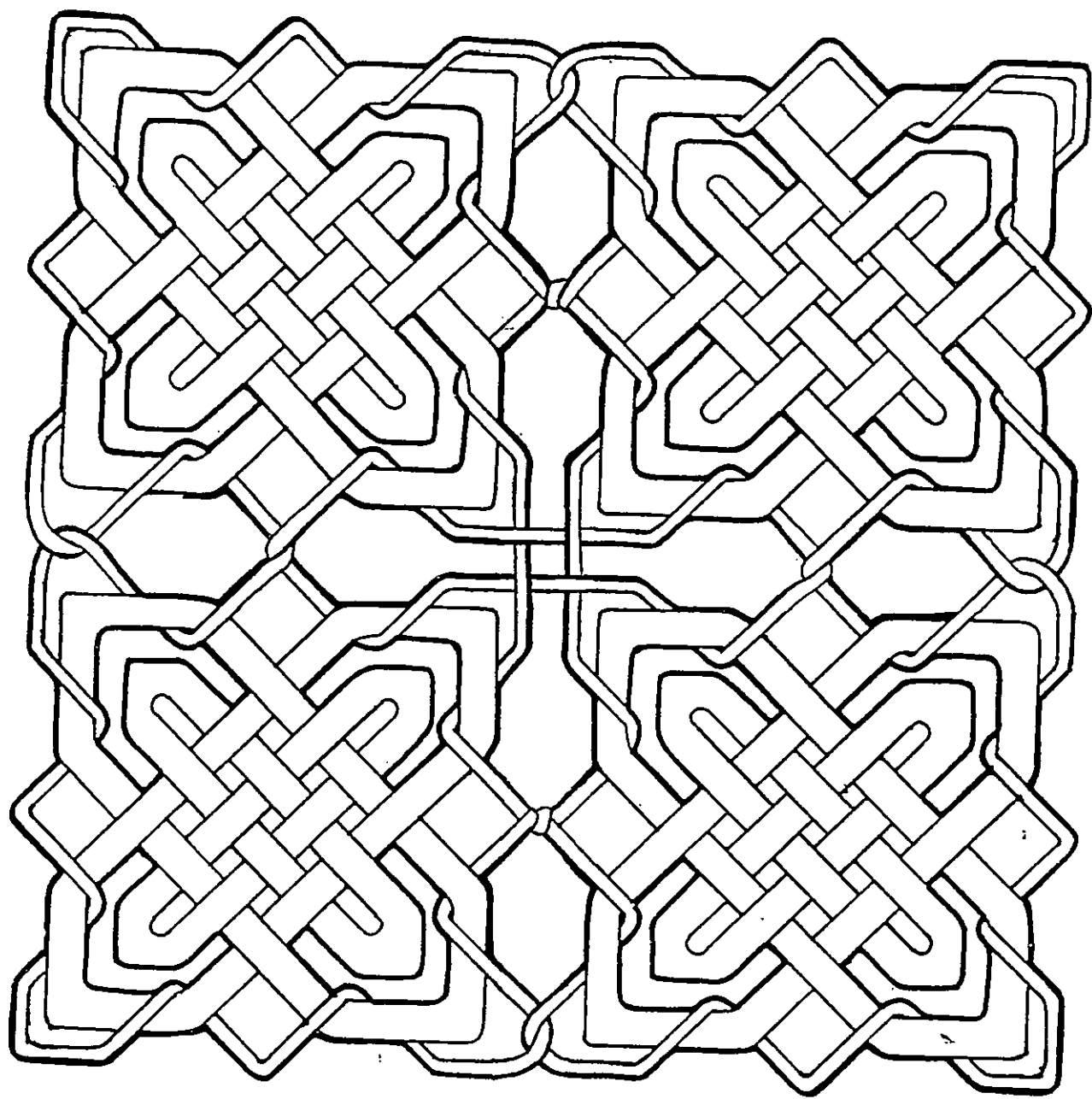
"Not usually, but this little guy nearly got creamed by that maniac," he stroked the dog's head, "But the clever little speed demon avoided him neatly. Hey that's a good name, Demon. How do you like that name, fella?"

The dog gave a happy bark.

"See, he likes it. Don't you little guy? Demon," Bodie said hugging the dog closer.

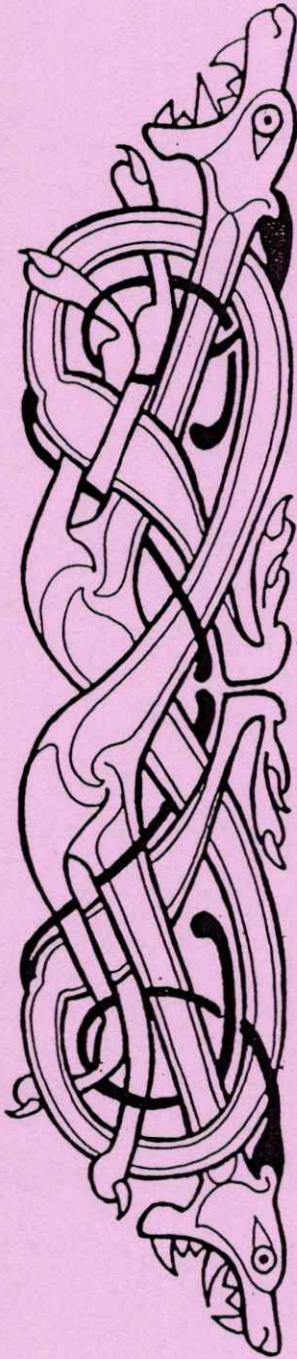
Ray was about to remind Bodie that 'Demon' was a stray with an unknown past and an uncertain future, but the image of the little boy caring for his dog stopped him. Bodie never talked about his childhood, but sometimes he would reveal the little boy hidden inside. One who needed to act like a child just for a little while, as if he had missed out on that time in his life. Ray sighed happily, knowing that with him, Bodie felt safe to let the little boy out. Glancing over at his passengers, he realized Bodie gave him that same safety and with their job, they both needed to let the child some playtime for sanity's sake. Maybe, Bodie needed to take care of a helpless animal for awhile, a nurturing need which in someone with a normal job would be utilized in caring for a wife and children. Okay, Demon, he thought to himself, you found yourself a protector for awhile. He'll take good care of you, the same as he has always done for me.





No Hunting Permitted

by *Crochet*



Evening crept in and
stole my dream
as moonlight on my face
waking the hunger.

The night calls,
so I fly.

Soft breezes slide
over me-
warm or cold -
I can feel neither.

Below,
I hear the pounding
of its heart.

His blood is hot
pouring into my mouth
slacking the thirst.

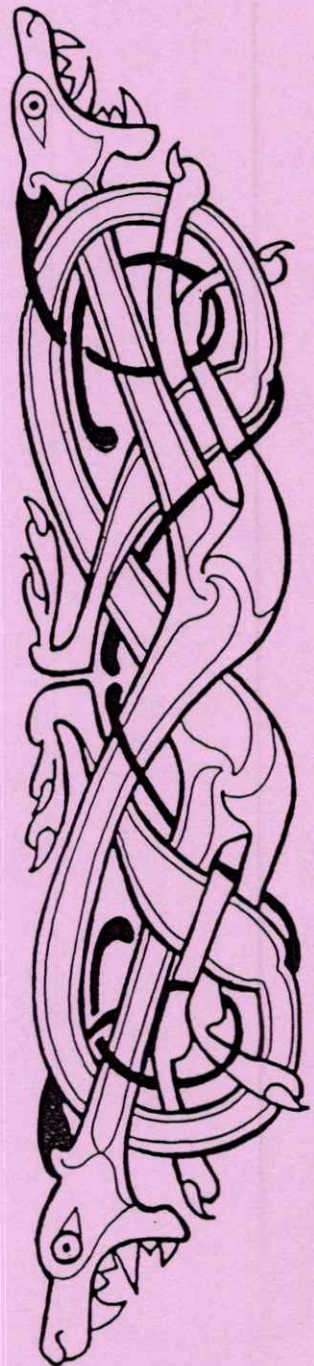
Hunter is hunted.
Hunter is brought down.

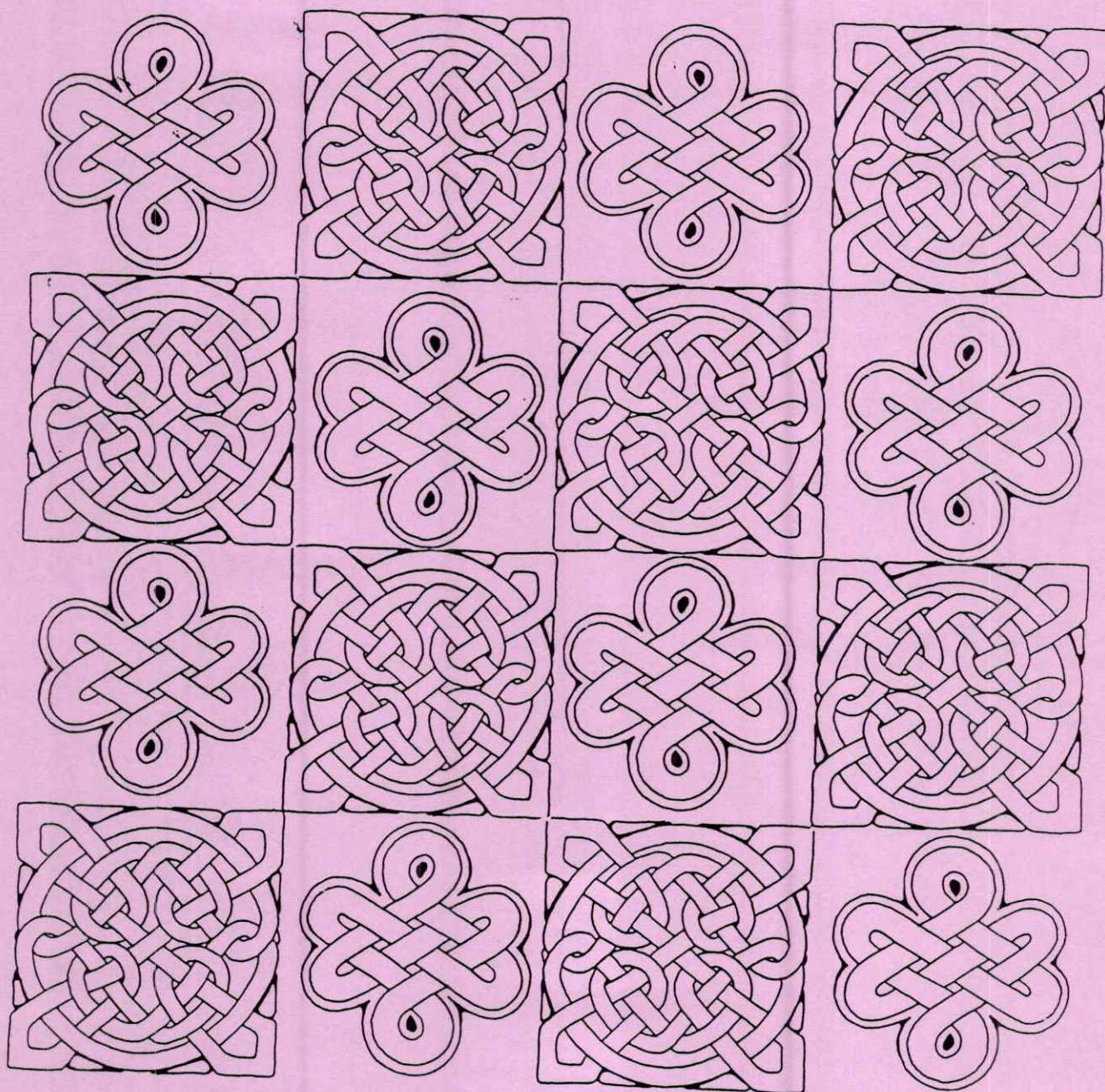
The thrill of the kill
sweet taste of victory.

I lick the corner of my mouth
good to the last drop.

A bush rustles
I spy the intended,
safe for another night.

Extinguish the light
free the captive back to
the night forest
as the night calls again.
Another poacher to hunt.





Scotch Doubles

The Story So Far.....

While on a personal and secret mission for their boss George Cowley, Raymond Doyle and William Bodie are victims of a plane crash in the mountains of Tibet.

Severely injured, they're rescued by a lost civilization of monks and three agents from the international organization of Nemesis and taken to a hidden City nestled in the frozen wasteland. Their hosts heal and endow them with extraordinary powers. While reluctant guests in the City, Ray and Bodie learn and discover their new powers and each other.

In the mean time back home, everyone thinks they're dead. With the help of their new Nemesis friends, the boys return to England in time to save Cowley and CI5 from the grips of a MI5 traitor.

After taking care of that problem, Cowley sends the boys to a special facility as a way of putting them through their paces and discovering the extend of their new "talents" and because they have no place to live as their flats were sold after their demises. While inmates at "the devil's boot camp", they offer up a few surprises and pay-backs to the trainers.

In Switzerland, Craig - now the head of Nemesis, and Sharron await the arrival of Richard whom they left behind in the City while delivering their new proteges back to England. For them it's only been a few weeks, but to Richard living in the City where time has no meaning, it's been closer to a year. Richard calls and tells them he's on his way home but before Craig and Sharron can hang up - presto, Richard materializes in the office then promptly passes out in a coma. His bedside vigil shared by Sharron and Craig allows them to bond and share. Richard awakes in a few days, all is well and Sharron leaves for England to prepare for her up-coming nuptials to Remy.

Still without a place to live and refusing to go back to the "camp" for more tests and trials, the boys temporary move into Richard's loft in London where they enjoy a impromptu love making session in a lighting storm on the balcony. The results are "shocking".

And now, the continuing story of Scotch Doubles.....



The Tie That Binds

by *Ty*

Chapter 1

Sharron knelt down before the old leather trimmed trunk. Gently, she brushed her hand over the top - identifying and tracing the intricate Celtic pattern tooled into the leather over a century before. Her actions made a stirring of dust. If she wasn't so intent on the chest and its anticipated contents, Sharron would've marveled at the graceful pirouettes the tiny dust mote fairies danced on their journey upward into a shaft of golden afternoon sunlight.

Not all of the dust scurried into the sunbeam, a few errant dancers made their way up into her nose and she stopped herself short of a rousing sneeze. Stifflingly it was uncomfortable, but Sharron did so to maintain the reverent quiet that had descended upon the attic. A loud noise would be disturbing, but to whom she wondered - ghosts?

Sneezing again, she wiped her itchy nose on the cuff of her cotton pullover before flipping open the stiff iron latches and carefully opening the trunk - her motions tentative like Pandora's. Immediately she detected the familiar scents of cedar and lavender. The musky conifer smell was from the internal lining and the lavender, well Sharron knew what that was from too, the delicate pale green tissue paper that shrouded the prize - her mother's wedding gown. With trembling fingers, she unfolded the paper - careful not to rip it - till at last she saw the ivory lace creation.

Stiffly she got up - dress in hand and went to stand before the cracked cheval glass. The old mirror, complete with candle holders mounted on each side, stood in the west corner of the jumbled attic next to a bulls-eye window. As the dappled low rays of sun illuminated the filmy glass, she held the gown up to her well-defined figure. The last time she'd done this, the dress had dragged on the floor and her tiny seven year old hands could barely hold the weight up to her shoulders. But today, 40 years later, it was a perfect match and it was hers. Like all the Walsh women before her, going back five generations to her namesake ancestor Sharron Walsh Godfrey, she would wear this gown on her wedding day. Despite the many years of style changes and alterations, the dress was essentially the same as when it was first worn in 1815.

With a pang of bitter-sweet memory, Sharron thought back to her brief first marriage to Christopher Dean Macready. They were so in love and eager to be together, thoughts of this dress and family traditions were far from her mind. All she knew then was; she wanted Chris and he her. They married at the Registrar's office in Nottingham and less than a year later he was dead - killed while on assignment for MI6. At the ripe old age of 19, Sharron found herself a widow and alone again.

With no clear course or direction she'd buried her grief in intense academic studies. After reading for and attaining many degrees, she finally stopped and joined the team at MI6. But it wasn't until years later, after joining Nemesis, that Sharron found peace and companionship.

Her memories of Christopher were now muted and faded like an old sepia photo, as if he were from a past lifetime. Sharron smiled at that thoughtful phrase, because in fact this was the second one she was working on.

Shaking herself from the melancholy daydream, she remembered the matching veil still tucked away in the trunk. Laying the gown carefully over the back of a broken rocker, she went over to retrieve it. Finding the pearl embroidered lace netting, she returned to the mirror and eagerly arranged it on her head. The yellowed ivory combs sewn into the crown were still in place, so she used them to secure the headdress. As a child, she remembered it dragging on the floor also, but now the veil hung perfectly to the small of her back.

Feeling like that little girl again, she began twirling in circles before the mirror. The flapping motion of the veil set up a dust storm. In tandem she started to giggle and sneeze. Between the spinning and violent sneezing, Sharron began to feel light headed and nauseated. Desperately, she grabbed onto the mirror frame for support. Woozy and with the room still tilting, she desperately tried to get her bearings.

Suddenly she heard the strange noises coming from outside - horses out on the street and the jingle of their harnesses - children screaming and laughing in the garden below. Curious by the unfamiliar and out of place sounds, Sharron got up took a step- none too steadily towards the window to have a look out. Then she noticed the attic was no longer dusty and many of the discarded chairs and tables she had to step around and bumped into earlier were gone. There were still pieces of broken furniture about, but to her shock their fabric coverings and finishes were no longer faded, they appeared newer. Her confused gaze went full circle before coming to rest on the mirror that was now no longer cracked.

The last thing Sharron would remember before passing out was seeing her great-great-great-grandmother's reflection staring back instead of her own.

Downstairs in her bright airy kitchen, Elizabeth Walsh was happily humming a tune. She was assembling the ingredients for the Coq Au Vin planned for evening meal. Upstairs all was quiet but she knew Sharron was busily digging away through the family heirlooms. With a grimace of shame, Elizabeth realized it'd been years since she'd gone up into the attic and imagined the layers of dust and cobwebs her niece must be wading through. She made a mental note to have some cleaners in soon to tackle the dreaded overdue job.

As Elizabeth reached for a sharp narrow knife she hoped her efforts at a special dinner wouldn't be going to waste again tonight. Sharron, normally a hearty eater and blessed with a constitution that allowed her to indulge without weight gain, wasn't doing justice to her culinary efforts. She had expressed concern for her nieces' health, but Sharron self-diagnosed a touch of stomach flu and was declining all dishes except a bit of soup and toast occasionally.

Elizabeth liked having someone else in the cavernous old house. She had never thought of herself as lonely, but realized, until you have company, you don't truly appreciate what you've been missing. She loved Sharron and was thoroughly enjoying her visit.

This afternoon had been Sharron's first chance to get up into the attic since arriving a week ago. When she first got to England, her time was taken up with meetings with George Cowley and CI5 concerning Bodie and Doyle. Along with a now fully recovered Richard Barrett and doting Craig Stirling, her Nemesis colleagues, Elizabeth had been a part of those sessions. She was a valuable witness to what the powers were and how they affected a person. Their testimonies coupled with George Cowley's high regard for Miss Walsh's opinions cleared the two CI5 men back into active duty.

Elizabeth had enjoyed seeing George again - it'd been months since their last visit. She was very fond of him and felt comfortably sure the feelings were mutual. She smirked at the thought of how she'd react and what she'd do if he ever made a romantic move.

"Lord knows," She sighed, "I've given him enough opportunities and hints over the past years."

Then Elizabeth wondered if maybe it was because he was too much of a gentleman or maybe just plain daft. Knowing full well he wasn't the latter, she decided it was going to be up to her to make the first obvious move - no more hints. Thus the reason for this fancy dinner and George expected in a few hours. She stopped cutting and took a look at the naked grotesque bird dangling by a leg from her hand.

"I can't believe I'm trusting my future happiness to a hunk of dead fowl." She said, addressing the chicken. Then looking around the room she added, "I can't believe I'm actually talking aloud and having a conversation with a dead chicken!"

Sighing and not expecting an answer, Elizabeth returned to the task at hand and her thoughts to Sharron as a child.

As a little girl, Sharron loved to play up in the attic and sit for hours in front of an old cracked mirror - doing or imagining who knows what she mused. She knew her orphaned niece had been an introverted and lonely child but figured that was due to losing her parents at such a young and vulnerable age. She recalled how relieved she was when the girl finally made some real friends and started enjoying her studies and boarding school. She'd done her best to be an adequate surrogate and tried to make the girl's holidays special because her own career with MI6 kept her busy and away most of the time. But despite her efforts, there were more than one or two Christmas breaks and Easter holiday weeks Sharron had to spend alone at school.

As guardian and only living relative, Elizabeth sternly objected to Sharron marrying so young and especially to one of her colleagues. But the girl was of legal age and could do as she pleased without consent. Elizabeth didn't hold a grudge, and in fact was sensitive enough to realize it was what Sharron craved and something she couldn't and didn't give her enough of as a child - attention and companionship. It also helped that she liked Christopher and she could see how happy they were together. His death left a dark shadow over in her heart too.

Deftly boning the chicken, Elizabeth's thoughts moved to Sharron's upcoming wedding and couldn't help the smile that creased her face. She was so happy for her. There was a time she'd given up hope Sharron would ever find another mate or had even wanted to. At last, another Walsh would wear the old gown. Her smile dimmed a measure as she realized it would probably never be her.



Chapter 2

With intense scrutiny, Alexi Martapopov watched the man across the table from his hard wooden seat. In one hand he clutched a half-empty vodka bottle and in the other a grimy handkerchief drenched with the sweat from his lined pox-marked brow. His skin was sallow and his face was an indifferent lifeless mask making him look decades older than his forty-five years. The only sign of animation in the stoop shoulder bulk was his fervent piercing black eyes - the impassioned gaze of a madman.

The object of his interest, Sean "The Fiddler" McCaskey, was putting the finishing touches on a neat little gelignite package. Measuring the size of a cigar box, the bomb had the capacity to level a city block and leave a crater half way to China - so boasted its creator. Alexi wasn't interested in China or its billions of residents, just one particular late 18th century Georgian-style manse in Runnymede and its present owner.

For seven long miserable years while in a KGB gulag, Martapopov dreamed of revenge against the people he believed put him there. With each demeaning and terror filled day, he devised a new way of death for Elizabeth Walsh and George Cowley.

The other players in the double agent spy probe that went astray were dead - Dawson, Kovac and even that insufferable dandy Twig. Only Ferris lived, but in an English prison. Losing a man like Dawson in the high ranking position of MI6 chief was a major blow. Therefore, the blame fell on the lone survivor - Martapopov. He was a small fish, so small CIS never even knew he was in the picture. Thinking everyone involved was dead or in jail, Cowley and the Ministry had considered the case closed.

As an added insult, Martapopov's own people had forgotten him too. But then when a new government and a revised code of standards came into power, he was released from jail to make room for real criminals. What little pride and status he had for being a political prisoner and secret-agent was stripped. His fellow zeks didn't want him to forget where he came from and he almost didn't survive his final week of good-bye parties in the showers. The physical and emotional scars he still bore were excellent reminders. Any sanity left in Alexi Martapopov, was quickly used up those last days. The man Russia released from Gulag 17 bore little resemblance to the ambitious agent from the glory days. He was now an automaton with a single mission and this time he would allow no room for failure.

The Fiddler liked to hum irritating and monotonous little tunes when he worked. It acted to calm his nerves by annoying others so they'd leave the room and him in peace. All except the fat little Ruskie sitting there across from him. Instead of unnerving him, Sean found the opposite was happening and he was none too pleased.

In all the years he'd spent in the IRA, he'd never run across a character like this Russian.

He knew that look in Martapopov's eyes - seen it before in some of the crazed zealots he'd served with. Those kind didn't last long and cruse them all, they usually took good people with them to the grave. Sean made a point to stay clear of the zeals, as he called them, but today his situation didn't allow him to be choosy. This was the first real paying job he'd gotten in six months.

A year and a half had gone by since he'd been booted from the family and all because of a difference of opinion. He didn't see the problem with killing a few Americans. For that matter, he didn't know that tourist bus was stalled in that tunnel. His job was to blow up a road and the tunnel it passed through, not count cars and check passports.

Every war has casualties. This was one of the major points he'd been taught to believe in. That, and the first rule of warfare - to wreck havoc on the enemies' commerce. What better commerce to prey upon than tourism, especially the Americans - they scare so easy. He also hated the mutt pedigree bastards traipsing over to find their *roots*, as they called it. Hell, weeds have roots - but tourists have money and they spend it. Dry up that and you cripple the loyalist sods.

McCiskey also didn't give a rat's ass for the American money coming to the cause or the fact the Soviet sources were now a trickle. They never should have become dependent on it in the first place, he debated. It was their war, not the bloody colonists or Ruskies. And he countered, they still had the camel fuckers pumping in oil money, so what was the worry. He also argued any press - bad or good was still press and it keep the cause in the limelight. But in spite of his talents and their need of them, he was kicked out. And if it wasn't for relatives and favors owed to him by those close to the top, he would have been eliminated all together.

Not easily discouraged, Sean went out with one plan. A cunning plan he hoped would bring together his old comrades with victory. It was to pick up where Guy Fawkes left off and fucked up over 300 years before. Thoughts of seeing Parliament in flames as the result of one of his creations was his dream - his goal. With his skill and today's technology, it was possible to succeed where Guy failed. His only problem was money for the supplies and equipment - therefore this job for the Ruskie.

Thoughts of his employer made Sean look up at Martapopov. Again he was revolted by the sight and needed to remind himself of the promised 10,000 quid. Promised, he thought. In the past he'd always demand half the money up front. It was another gloomy sign of his present position. The humiliation of it made him so angry he decided to kill the bastard with his own hands if there wasn't the promised pay-off. It wasn't something he did often, preferring to let one of his creations do his dirty work, but this situation was personal.

Chapter 3

The plumb white clouds floated all around him. With a slight kick, Ray glided over to one and hesitantly reached out. His hand met with a tacky wispy substance - like sticky cotton. Curious, he pinched a bit off, gave it a smell then popped it into his mouth.

"Sweet", he mused aloud with a smile. A simple childhood notion was proven true - clouds really are made of cotton candy. With unabandoned glee, he plunged face first into the fluffy mass and began chewing and lapping up the vanilla flavored confection.

Eating his full and undeterred by the pieces of fluff still clinging to his head and face, Ray kicked out again and began flying among the clouds - slalom fashion, enjoying the breeze fluttering over his naked body. Bored with this, he began a series of rolls and other fancy maneuvers. Then one over zealous cartwheel took him into a gaggle of geese, shattering their perfect V formation. Floating to a stop, Ray wistfully watched the perturbed birds realign and form behind a new leader before continuing on their way.

"To fly" he sighed. "I always wished I could do that." His gaze went from the quickly retreating birds to the ground below - very far below.

A surge of panic coursed through Ray as realization came clear. He couldn't fly, yet here he was 1,000 feet off the ground with no visible means of support or a parachute.

Reality suspended fantasy and with a loud scream, Ray began plummeting towards a very hard looking ground at a rapid rate of descent. Then he saw what looked like a pair of dumpling shaped pontoons floating in a stream. Spreading his arms and legs out wide, he glided towards the softer landing spot with a belly-flop crash.

"Ray! What the fuck..." Bodie didn't finish the oath as he tried to disentangle himself from his feather covered lover who'd just plopped on top of him. It was 3 a.m. and up until a few moments ago, Bodie had been happily asleep. Now he was wide awake staring in a mixture of vexation and concern at his choking partner.

Scattered all over the normally neat and cozy bedroom were tiny white feathers. Seeing Ray's chewed up and half empty pillow on the floor by the dresser, he figured out the where, but the why of the situation escaped him. Hearing a serious bit of gagging, Bodie's attention was again on his lover and quickly grabbed a handy waste bin. He passed it in front of Doyle just as the man became violently sick and vomited up a mixture of last evenings stew and feathers.

Leaving Ray hugging the can, he went into the bath to get a glass of water and a wet flannel. He found Ray as he left him, sitting on the side of the bed, naked, spotted with down and cradling the waste bin. Sitting down next to him and gently wiping Ray's sweaty face - he handed the miserable man the glass of water.

"Rinse you mouth out, you'll feel better for it."

Looking up now after a drink, Ray's confused gaze met Bodie's eyes for the first time. "What happened Bodie?" He croaked, his voice rough from the feathers and sickness.

Picking a feather from his lover's hair, Bodie held it out from them to look at.

"This is or I should say, was, your pillow. What you didn't ingest is scattered all about the room. I woke up *after* you crashed onto my back." Bodie paused then whispered, "You were flying again sunshine."

Shaking his head in disbelief and shame, Ray buried his face into his hands with a groan.

"What were you dreaming about?" Asked Bodie as he plucked more fluffy pieces of down from Ray's curls.

"Clouds" came back a muffled reply.

"Clouds? What kind of clouds?"

"Cotton candy kind and there were geese flying about too, I think" Ray was looking up now as memory of his dream came back.

"Ah..." Chuckled Bodie his quick mind adding two plus two and getting 5,000 goose feathers. "Hungry were you?"

"Loved the stuff as a kiddie." Ray punctuated the statement with a loud belch.

"Well, as I take a *gander* around here and *down* at you, I'm not surprised you're *gagging* now."

Ray was either too miserable to notice or purposefully ignored Bodie's pitiful pun, making his partner disappointed.

"This new talent of your is getting dangerous." Said Bodie, waiting for the storm of Ray's retort, but to his surprise, none came. Ray just silently nodded and continued staring at the floor.

"At least this time the room's got shorter ceilings and no open windows." He continued with a shudder as he recalled Ray's last bout of un-tethered sleep floating.

They were still bunking at Richard's place in London high atop a converted warehouse on a bank of the Thames river. Unlike tonight, something made Bodie stir and wake-up. Finding the bed empty, he walked out of the open bedroom door to see his naked lover slowly floating out the open balcony doors. Bodie got to Ray and grabbed a foot just as he was passing over the railing. The sudden pull and stop woke Ray up and he came crashing to the floor.

Worried about Ray causing a problem to low flying planes and the likely possibility he'd wake up in mid-flight and plummet to the earth for an untimely death, Bodie devised a plan. He purchased a few yards of silk cording and every night before they went to sleep, he'd tie one end around Ray's foot and the other to his wrist. If Ray went into flight, the jerk of the cord would wake him up and he'd gently pull his partner back into bed without waking him. Ray felt like a tethered zeppelin and didn't like it much, but since they both enjoyed the fresh air and sleeping with windows open it was a necessity.

"Should have tied me up again." Murmured Ray, eyes still on the floor.

"Feeling kinky again?" teased Bodie knowing full well what Ray meant, but trying to break his lover's depression.

"Not kinky, but maybe hungry." Ray was now looking up with a searching look on his face.

"After all the feathers you ate?"

"Not much substance to them." Ray smiled and looked at Bodie. "Just before I crashed I remember seeing what I thought were chubby dumplings floating in a bright blue stream. The memory made me famished." Ray looked from Bodie's bare posterior to the colored sheets covering the bed.

Bodie glared, he knew full well what Ray was saying and remembered the position he was in before the crash landing.

"Food, you're thinking about food? You criticize *my* appetite Doyle and you're the one eating like there's no tomorrow. Wouldn't be so bad, but then you end up being sick every morning. Don't think your healthy metabolism can take the guilt of normal digesting."

Ray answered him by getting up, gathering a sheet about his naked form like a toga then silently marching off towards the kitchen. He paused only momentarily in the doorway to stick his tongue out at Bodie. Ray's verbal silence was matched by a telepathic silence as well.

Filled with anger and frustration, Bodie got up to follow, but stopped and stood in the middle of the floor shaking with rage as he silently counted to ten. By five he was able to stop quivering and unclenched his fists. At eight his breathing was deeper, less panting and by ten his anger was replaced with concern but none the less frustration. Warily he sat on the edge of the bed - staring off into space - seeing nothing, his thoughts a jumble.

Part of his frustration was out of confusion over Ray and the way he was acting. Moody didn't half cover it. He was used to Ray's tempers and radical mood swings. But this Ray, the Ray of the past few weeks was a whole new ballgame. Hot and cold emotions he could live with and was used to.

"Hell" he muttered, "I have for the past 13 years as his partner."

It was the other problems, the crazy appetite, frequent stomach bugs and that unnerving sleep-flying. While the first two problems were worrisome enough, the flying was really frightening him. He shuddered at the memory of seeing his lover slowly gliding out that open balcony door. His morbid imagination kept conjuring up different and more terrifying scenes of what could have happened if he hadn't reached him in time. It gave him more than a few sleepless nights.

Not wishing to dwell on that, he focused his attentions on the other two problems, he snorted at the incongruity of his thoughts. He was remembering back to his boyhood when his mum was pregnant with his soon to be sisters Mabel and Meghan. Ray was behaving just like his mother had - moody and emotional like a bloody manic-depressive. And eat, he could still see her grazing through a whole box of Swiss rolls at tea time and this from a woman who counted calories as closely and as doggedly as she did gray hairs. That aside, the worst was her being sick in the mornings. Her queasiness meant he had to go without breakfast and her monopoly of the loo made him late for school more than once. Most days he couldn't wait and would relieve himself outside in the garden. Come spring he was very happy his mum choose to blame the cold dry winter for killing her prized Rhododendrons and not look for other reasons.

Now Ray was doing the same. He shook his head at the absurd thought. He knew their powers had done some major changes to their physical condition, but *that* was too extreme. And he reasoned, if it could happen to them, Richard and Craig would have a nest full by now. Plus, one of the things Sharron specifically told them about their new condition was they were no longer able to father children or in her case, become pregnant. Knowing Richard and Craig's relationship and his and Ray's, it didn't matter to them, but he was sure it did to Sharron. He remembered the sad look that fleetingly passed over her face when she told them. Figuring it was too personal of a question, he never asked her feelings on the topic.

Nope he decided, it was all a coincidence. Maybe a surge in appetite was due to the fact they now lived in the country. After all, his appetite had grown with all the hard work and fresh air they now had.

Never one to shy away from manual labor, these latest tasks of painting, repairing and ground clearing were almost of joy because it was his house - his and Ray's. Bodie still couldn't believe the old man went along with his plan and allowed him to buy safe house 13 - that little cottage near Stapleford Abbots where he and Ray had pledged themselves to each other.

After Murphy and Susan's report and Cowley's visit, the house was deemed *unsuitable* for CI5 needs. CI5's loss was their gain. They didn't even have to fret the peak hour commute and in exchange for paying on their own dwelling, Cowley agreed to foot the bill for a secure, windowless garage in town where they kept their cars. Ten minutes before roll call, no matter what the weather or traffic patterns, they'd *transport* to their cars and drive the few blocks to work. This allowed them the luxury of living in the country, being able to work in town and still sleep-in. Bodie liked having those extra early hours with Ray. Making love in the morning was his favorite way to wake up. But instead of hearing whispers of endearments, he now awoke to the sounds of the loo.

He tried talking to Ray and get him to go to a doctor or better yet Sharron, but Ray would have none of it. He insisted he was fine and blamed the well water they now used at the cottage. When Bodie reminded him they were in England not Mexico and that he was drinking the same water without those symptoms, Ray countered it with the fact everyone reacted differently to bacteria. And he insisted since his appetite wasn't affected he wasn't sick. Normally in times of illness, that was the first to go - not thrive.

Bodie didn't know what to believe, all he knew was, his bum was getting cold and the aroma of cooking wafting out from the kitchen was making him hungry too. Opting for sweats and slippers instead of the bare footed Roman fashion Ray was wearing, he went off in search of the sausage and eggs he could smell frying ~~up~~.

He found Ray standing in front of the electric stove busily cooking. His back was to the door but he felt Bodie's presence hovering there, waiting for acknowledgment.

"Well, don't just stand there Bodie," He mentally admonished, "set the table - of course I've made enough for two."

Bodie smiled and like Ray, mentally continued the conversation. "Bossy for so early. You watch my yolks now, you know I hate when they get hard."

Bodie punctuated his silent wish with the loud sound of a plate firmly being placed on the table.

"Hey ! Watch the crockery Mavis and I'll watch your eggs. Don't blame me if they sometimes come out firm. When it comes to you lover, I've been trained to make everything firm for you."

Ray sent along waves of telepathic lust with his teasing double entendre. He knew the results were immediate and on the mark when Bodie let out a low groan and dropped a cup. He silently giggled to himself while Bodie recovered and regained some composure.

With wide eye innocence, Ray deliberately served up the meal. But then, just as Bodie was sitting down, he let go with another surge of lust. Bodie yelped as he plopped down and made contact with the hard wooden seat - Ray's giggle wasn't as silent this time.

Bodie took a deep breath and glared into Ray's mischievous twinkling eyes. His face was a passive mask of innocent wonder, but the eyes betrayed his amusement. Seeing this, Bodie declared war and resolved to fight fire with fire. He conjured up highly detailed and lascivious thoughts then projected them. As a visual aid, he employed the food on his plate as symbols and props for his assault.

With a forced casual ease, he speared the end of a plump, firm, and juice engorged banger - then deliberately plunged it into the firm yellow crest of the fried egg. The thick yolk coated the sausage and Bodie slowly stirred it around in the liquid. He raised it to his mouth, parted his lips, then thoroughly sucked and tongued the egg off. Bodie didn't need his telepathic ability to know Ray was watching him totally mesmerized. This attention inspired him to accentuate his motions and intensify his erotic telepathic bombardment. He could feel Ray's passion rise and just at the height of it - he cruelly bit down and chopped the sausage in two. Ray almost jumped out of his chair and let out a yelp. All Bodie did was smile and chew - savoring the moment.

Letting a few moments pass for Ray to recover, Bodie then went to work on a roll. Reaching across the table into the bread basket, he purposely allowed his fingers to brush against Ray's bare forearm. He could feel the actual electrical tingle between them and heard Ray's sharp intake of breath. But they both still said nothing.

Outwardly appearing unaffected, Bodie selected a high top Parker house roll with its distinct split top. Holding the roll in both hands, Bodie rubbed his right thumb up and down the cleft seeking a suitable spot. Finding it, he plunged his thumbs in and practically pried open the two sides. Using his right thumb now, he began working it in and out of the soft dough making a larger hole. Bodie was aware of Ray rocking and squirming in his seat.

The final straw for Ray came when Bodie bypassed the stick of still frozen butter and picked up the bottle of squeezable margarine. He watched as Bodie shoved the nozzle into the hole he'd made in the roll and gently squeeze. The combination of the subtle erotic act, a dirty mind and the bombarding waves of lust were too much and he snapped.

In a flash, Ray was out of his chair - the force of the action sending it flying into the sink. With a sweep of his arm, he cleared the table top - sending most of the food and dishes crashing to the floor. Grabbing Bodie roughly by the arm, he pulled him out of his chair and bent him face first over the table.

As Bodie felt his sweat pants pulled down - exposing his bare arse, a surge of fear laced excitement coursed through him, instantly hardening his cock and making him lightheaded. He felt Ray's hot breath close to his left ear and heard the harsh panting. Bodie could tell he was on the edge and in as desperate of a need as he was. To heighten the moment, he pretended to struggle and was rewarded with Ray draping himself over his naked flanks and pressing a hard cock between his rear cheeks. He then felt Ray reach his arm around for something on the table. One of the few things left was that semi-frozen stick of butter. His libido leaped for joy as Ray reached for the stick. Bodie screamed and hissed with pleasure laced pain as Ray roughly pushed the ice cold bar into him. The initial sting of violation subsided as his body heat melted the butter.

In and out Ray pushed the stick - thoroughly coating him. Bodie bucked and whimpered with each thrust. As the stick became smaller, Bodie's pleas for more became louder and louder reaching a full wail as Ray swollen cock replaced the melting stick and plunged into him.

Now Bodie was gripping the far edge of the table for support, while Ray's dairy stained hands slipped and squeezed Bodie's ass trying to spread his cheeks farther apart so he could drive in even deeper. As last Ray came, wave after pulsating wave mixing with the butter.

Calmly down, but still hard and realizing Bodie hadn't come yet, Ray pulled him upward to stand up - still keeping his hard cock firmly impaled in his lover's bottom. Spreading his legs and bending them slightly for balance, he supported Bodie in a semi-squatting position. Ray then wrapped his arm's around him and grabbed onto Bodie's weeping cock. In this position, Ray began thrusting and pumping, thrusting and pumping - taking Bodie's weight and giving them both the ride of their lives. Within moments, Bodie came with a high pitched primal roar.

When Ray finally pulled out - still hard, Bodie hissed at the sudden emptiness and turned around to look at his lover for the first time since they started. He noticed Ray was sweating, breathing hard and even though he'd felt the man come twice - he was still hard.

It was Bodie's turn now, he picked Ray up and laid him on his back up on the table. Finding a jar of grape jelly, he scooped some out and deliberately began rubbing it on Ray's cock. After thoroughly coating it, he placed his hands under Ray's hips and raised his lover's lower body upward so he could reach the butter and jelly coated cock. Greedily Bodie sucked and nibbled on the sweet treat. He then pushed two jelly coated fingers up into Ray and gently massaged his lover's sensitive pleasure giving nub.

When Ray came - he exploded and it was all Bodie could do to hold on and swallow. He finally released him after the last shudder and spurt, then helped him up into a sitting position. Face to face now, they kissed for a long time - tasting each other and savoring the moment.

Nuzzling Ray's ear with his sticky mouth, Bodie whispered. "You raped me Mr. Insatiable, but I'm not complaining."

Ray nibbled back at Bodie's ear and countered, "Yeah, well you *graped* me. I'm not complaining either but if we don't get a bath soon, I will."

"Speaking of cleaning up....." Bodie let his sentence trail off as he took a look around the room at Ray's clearing up handiwork.

The hot water streaming down his back eased Bodie's muscle's and washed away the last remnants of butter. In front and facing him Ray stood under his share of the twin shower heads. His was head tilted back allowing the invigorating spray to cascade over his hair.

Taking advantage of the exposed area, Bodie leaned forward and began nuzzling his lovers neck. Gently he nibbled along; feeling the pulsating artery throb beneath his tongue. The beat was so strong, he could feel the vibrations in his teeth. And he marveled at the sensation as he brushed them up and down the blood filled pathway. Opening his mouth wide now, he firmly clamped down and sucked. Ray groaned and arched his back.

With his left hand, Bodie reached out and began pinching and rolling Ray's nipples - one at a time - equally stimulated and attended. With his right hand, he was steadily stroking Ray's erection. The rippling motions of his fingers along the shaft coupled with his thumb rubbing counter-clock wise over the head was producing delightful sounds and glorious feelings in his lover. At three points Ray was connected by pain and pleasure. His neck was on fire, while his ravaged nipples became taut and peaked. Bodie's movements were in perfect harmony, so the pain Ray was feeling there was accompanied by intense pleasure from his groin. Bodie's unrelenting pattern was rewarded as Ray issued a deep guttural groan and came all over Bodie's hand and the shower stall tiles. Caught up in the moment, Bodie's teeth inadvertently broke the skin on Ray's neck. He found the harsh metallic taste of blood interesting and not too unpleasant.

Smiling then opening his eyes, Ray was in that languid euphoric state of the recently orgasmed until he saw Bodie's blood smeared mouth and chin.

"Ghoul!" He yelled, eyes open wide in horror as his hand went to the injured area.

"Ray.., I didn't do it on purpose." Pleaded Bodie stretching out a hand in peace.

Ray backed up as far as he could in the cramp stall, his back against the tiles and his hand still clutching his neck.

"Bloody vampire!" He accused.

"Am not, was an accident. Anyway, you were exactly complaining." Countered Bodie.

"You drank my *blood*!"

"Did not!" Protested Bodie, feelings injured. "Was just a little lick. S'not like we haven't shared bodily fluids before."

"But this in my *blood* Bodie, People don't drink blood, only...."

"I'm not a bleeding vampire Doyle!"

"These powers Bodie, each of us is affected a little different, you don't suppose you, I mean... Well you don't tan!"

"Rubbish! I never tanned well, even before." Bodie's frustration changed and a perplexed look came across his face. "You know, it didn't taste that bad. In fact it was, well just different is all, I'm sure a person could get used to it." He schooled his face now to be reflective, a pensive innocent gaze.

"Like hell you will!" Growled Ray "Not with my neck you don't."

"But I thought you liked to be nuzzled"

"Nuzzled yes - guzzled NO!"

Ray stood his ground and still looked peeved. Bodie on the other hand was getting weary of the game.

"Ray, this is silly and the water's getting cold. Let's get out" Bodie didn't wait for a reply as he reached over and turned off the water. Opening the glass door, he was the first to step into the warm foggy bath, followed closely by Ray still clutching his neck.

Bodie grabbed a towel and began drying his lover. When he brushed against Ray's over stimulated and sensitive nipples, he hissed. He stopped and gently bestowed the red swollen peaks a kiss making Ray flinch - which he gracefully ignored. After getting his lover somewhat dry - he did the same for himself before returning his attentions back to Ray.

"Come here and let me have a look at it." He ordered, but Ray didn't budge. "I want to see what all the fuss is about and apply first aid, if needed."

Ray eyed him wearily, but then relented, crossed the two steps to his partner and removed his hand.

Bodie winced at the sight of the purplish full-moon brush complete with two neat rows of teeth marks. The slight external bleeding had stopped, but Bodie could see the blotch darken as some blood seeped around under the skin.

"Oops" He said a loss for words.

"Oops yourself Dracula."

"Don't really fancy myself as him. Now maybe Lestat..."

"Ghoul!"

"Ray, really, I wasn't trying to drain you dry. Well at least not there."

Doyle glared, Bodie countered, "It's just a hickey."

"The size of bloody fucking Texas!" Ray lamented as his fingers fingered the tender area.

"And," Bodie interrupted. "it'll be gone in a few hours. Look on the bright side - no one will see it."

"Lucky You."

"No, lucky for you sunshine. Who was it groaning and howling from pleasure a bit ago? Hmmm?" Bodie focused his dark blue eyes first on Ray's face, then a few feet lower. He raised one eyebrow for effect and as the punctuation to his rhetorical question.

Ray smiled and relaxed, previous misgivings all forgotten and said, "Come here you little blood mosquito."

Coming together in a hug, Bodie whispered in his ear while rubbing his hard erection along Ray's thigh. "Who you calling little?"

"He will be when I'm done with him."

"Oh, really? - What'd a gonna do to him?"

"Don't know - any ideas?"

"Always have those, Raymond my boy."

"Oh, so you want me to be your boy now, do you."

"Hmmm, has it's possibilities."

"Oh, now does it. What exactly would your *boy* do for you?"

"Depends, I guess. Is he a *good* boy or a *naughty* boy."

"Well, if *I* was your boy - I'd be very good at being naughty."

As Ray was teasing verbally, he'd being lightly rubbing his thigh up and down Bodie's cock. Bodie was keeping up the playful prattle but as his passions rose, his voice lowered.

"Where I come from," He growled "naughty boys get put over your knee and spanked."

"And where did you come from - A Victorian novel?" Ray snorted in amusement. He'd tried reading a few of the anonymously written books and couldn't help laughing. He found them comic as opposed to stimulating and he was still trying to figure out what *gamauching* was.

"No Liverpool, life is hard there."

"Life is hard here too lover." Purred Doyle as he reached down to fondle Bodie's enormous penis making Bodie sigh. "No need to resuscitate this monster - he doesn't need the *kiss of life*."

Seeing Bodie frown, Ray added. "But I could arrange for a *petite mort, n'est pas?*"

"*Oui! Oui!*", agreed Bodie.

"Well, if you have to go that bad, do it first. I'll be waiting in the bedroom." Retorted Ray in mock seriousness.

"Arsehole!" Groaned Bodie in frustration. Grabbing his lover's arm he began pulling him into the adjacent bedroom and towards their large inviting bed - in spite of all the scattered feathers.

"Why thank-you - that's exactly what I had in mind, ah yours that is."

"It's *always* been yours and it'll *always* be yours." Bodie said seriously.

"I know." Replied Ray, equally as serious. "But, right now all I want to do is pleasure you - to suck you, then sleep with you in my arms and after a few hours of that, have you wake up with me inside you."

Bodie didn't reply as he allowed himself to be guided onto the bed.

Bodie woke instantly, his senses coming on-line immediately. He felt his flesh tingle and pop into goose bumps from his muscles tensing, ready to pounce and attack.

He sensed Ray in the same state of readiness next to him. He also heard the sounds coming from the kitchen. Someone was there - an intruder. In tandem, they rolled off the bed - each clutching their retrieved guns.

Ray's carpenter friend had ingeniously fitted each side of their bed with a handy shelf-like box between the floor and box spring mattress. It was a hiding place then fumbling around a nightstand or having a lump under the pillow.

Who do you think it is? & How did they get in? Ray asked telepathically - seeking answers and asking questions but preserving the silence.

Not expecting anyone Answered Bodie as he quietly walked around the bed towards the door. *** I bet it was through the garden door. Damn latch doesn't catch right. Was going to fix it in the morning.***

Ray was now at his side. ***Want to try and transport in - take 'im by surprise?***

No, can't afford those few moments of disorientation we have after the ride. Could be more then one - they'd have the drop on us.

All right, agreed Ray, thinking in the same line and releasing the safety catch on his gun, ***we'll do it the old-fashioned way. Who's turn?***

Yours

Are you sure? Didn't I go in first last time?

Didn't count, no one was there.

Since when does that figure? A door is a door.

Yeah, unless it's a jar - okay, my turn it is. Shrugged Bodie as he switched his gun into his left hand and gently eased the bedroom door open.

Keeping close to the passageway wall, Bodie stealthily crept - gun raised up by his right ear. He didn't have to look or talk to know Ray was right behind him and that when he went in high and to the right - Ray would follow low and left. The knowledge didn't come from mind melding or powers - just experience and having the man at his back for over a decade.

Nearing the doorway to the kitchen the sounds were now getting louder. Whoever they were - they were making a lot of noise and didn't seem to care if they were heard. This worried them - burglars were more careful then that - so were the other types of professional bad guys. This intruder was either a rank amateur or so confidently dangerous he didn't care.

The partners stopped at the opening and Bodie began the silent mental countdown.

One

Two

On the downbeat of three the two men burst into the room - guns raised - screaming battle cries and ready for action. As Bodie went in first to the right, Ray followed with a roll to the left.

At the sight of the crazed yelling naked man rolling into the room, the small black and white mutt let out a yelp of surprise, grabbed a banger and ran like hell in the opposite direction. Suddenly another crazy man appeared and stepped directly in the way. The little dog tried to stop and change direction again, but the slippery linoleum floor wouldn't give in traction. His desperately scampering legs gave way and it slide spread-eagle into the man's leg - banger still firmly clenched between it's teeth.

"What the hell..." Exclaimed Bodie as he bent over and picked up the flattened pup and held it up face level. "Who in the world my you be? And how did you get in?"

The dog looked Bodie in the eye, narrowed it's gaze and let out a low growl.

"Put it down Bodie, it may bit you." Observed Ray as he flipped the safety back on and put his gun on the table.

"Not with a sausage in his mouth he won't."

Turning his attention back to the pup he asked, "Hungry boy? That why you risk your neck and come in here?" Bodie put the dog back on the floor and looked down. The dog looked back, then calmly sat down to eat the sausage. "Look Ray, he's starving - I could feel his little ribs when I held him. Think he's thirsty?"

"Considering it's polished off all the food that was scattered around, I wouldn't be surprised." Scoffed Ray as he surveyed the trashed floor.

Bodie sat his gun down next to Ray's then went over to the sink for a bowl to fill. He placed the water next to the dog. Giving Bodie another glare, the dog went over and drank it all up - happily wagging it's tail as it did.

"Look Ray!" Exclaimed Bodie. "He likes me!"

"Great" Snorted his partner as he began picking up pieces of dog washed plates and bowls from the floor. "Next thing you'll be wanting to keep it."

"Can we!" Cried Bodie in delight and happily staring down at the dog who was now sitting upright, head cocked to one side with one black ear up and the other white ear down, tongue lolling and panting with a merry tail wagging to finish.

"What!" Yelled Ray, now holding a broken cup and gingerly picking up the other pieces. "Are you crazy!"

Bodie's new found friend heard the anger in Ray's voice and ran for cover- shaking behind Bodie's legs.

"Now look what you've done, You scared Halleywell." Bodie bent over and lovingly picked up the small curly bundle of fur and cradled it protectively.

"Halleywell?"

"He looks like my old sergeant-major I had in the army. Same coloring, curly hair - even the eyes are similar. I recall he had a passion for bangers too."

"If you name it Bodie, you'll get attached to it and you'll want to keep it."

"It has a name, it's Halleywell. And I do intent on keeping him."

Hearing this the dog reached up and bestowed Bodie's chin with a wet kiss. Bodie smiled and returned the gesture with a rub behind the ears. The dog sighed at the deal and wagged it's tail.

"But Bodie...."

Ray's protest died on his lips as he looked up at the man and dog. He never seen this expression of pure joy on his lover before. No hard, wise-cracking world weary man, but the unabandoned intense simple pleasure of a boy and his dog. There was no way he could deny his lover this happiness, despite the fleas and bad breath.

"What happens if Halleywell has an owner?"

"He's got no collar and he looks like he's been on his own for awhile. I think he's abandoned. You know how the city people do - drive out to the country and turn a dog loose. They think they're doing the dog a favor. Shit, they're just trying to justify they're guilty consciousness for what usually amounts to murder!"

"And if it isn't and just lost and it's owners are looking for it?"

"Okay Ray - I'll go around and ask the neighbors. Stop being such a gloom and doom."

"Just being the voice of reason."

"Yeah, yeah" Bodie wasn't looking at him - his attention was still on Halleywell and his quick tongue.

"Well if you're going to keep it - you'll have to start calling it just Halley."

"Why?" Giggled Bodie as the pup and him played. He tried to grab an ear or nose, while Halleywell playfully nipped at his darting hand.

"Because, you sergeant-major is a girl."

"What?" Bodie looked up now in confusion. Halley took advantage of his distraction by landing a healthy bite to his thumb.

"Ouch!" He yelled pulling his hand away and shaking it. recovering, Bodie held the dog up under her forelegs and looked below.

"Halley it is." He agreed.

"I think it's about time you put your girlfriend outside for awhile."

"Why?" Asked Bodie suspiciously.

"Because she's *eaten* a lot and *drank* a lot of water."

Bodie looked again at Halley and realized what Ray meant. Carefully avoiding the pieces of broken glass with his bare feet, he went over to the partially open garden door and put the dog out and shutting it behind. Immediately Halley ran to the lawn. After visiting four different spots and leaving a memory behind, she happily galloped back to the door. Using a shoulder she pushed it open enough to get a nose in - then wiggled the rest.

Watching this Bodie exclaimed "Clever girl!" Head held high and tail wagging so hard and fast it went in a circle like a propeller - Halley soaked up the praise.

Bodie leant a hand and between him and Ray, they had the kitchen cleared in no time. Halley stayed out of the way. Finding a soft square of carpeting in front of the doorway, she curled up on it and intently watched the two men carryout their household chores.

She followed Bodie everywhere - as he got dressed, ate breakfast and did dishes. He only drew the line at coming into the loo after him. Patiently she waited for him outside the door for him to exit.

True to his word, Bodie bundled Halley into the ancient Range Rover they kept as their country car and went off to find her owners. Ray stayed behind on the pretense of some vague household project that needed attending to. The job wasn't important, he just wanted to give his partner the freedom to conduct what he knew would be a superficial and incomplete search that would most likely stay and end at the local pub that allowed pets.

Ray wasn't fond of dogs, but he was fond of his partner. Seeing Bodie's reaction to the fur ball was worth all the shedding hair and *accidents* to the carpets. He had to admit there was something different about this little beastie - like she's always belonged to them and was meant to be there. the thought gave Ray the chills as his imagination sprang forth with tales of old souls and spirits. reading too much Stephen King he decided and quickly dismissed the thoughts.

The hours flew by and it wasn't until the tea time that Ray heard the car door slam and the playful yaps of Halley.

He'd just finished painting the window frames and flower boxes and was cleaning up in the kitchen.. At the sounds of the prodigal pair, he turned on the kettle and went rummaging about in the refrigerator for food.

Ray felt Bodie's hands on his hips and the moist pressure of a kiss on his neck. He also smelled the fumes of ale. Turning around with plates and bowls crowding his hands he looked from his partner to Halley sitting expectantly next to the table and sporting a new bright red leather collar - then back again at Bodie.

"No luck?"

To avoid looking Ray in the face, Bodie hurriedly took the crockery and began setting the table. "Ah no, none. Searched all over and spoke with the neighbors. No one claims Halley."

"Oh, what a shame." Said Ray schooling his face in a serious worried expression.

"Yes, isn't it." Murmured Bodie, still not looking up.

"Well, I guess we'll just have to keep the little bug..., er girl." Ray corrected his statement as he heard Halley growl.

"If you don't think it'll be too much trouble...." Taking a quick peek at his partner, Bodie saw Ray grinning and felt relieved.

Hating to be the constant voice of reason, but knowing it had to be asked, "What'll we do with her when we're away at work - or out of days on end on a case? You know our weird hours and schedule."

Bodie was prepared for the questions - same ones he'd been asking and answering himself while Halley and him sat at the local pub drinking beer and eating cheese. He'd discovered much to his delight that Halley liked beer and cheese. Imagine finding a soul mate in a dog. He almost laughed aloud at his discovery but decided not or else have to share the joke with the other punters.

"I took the liberty of speaking with the McGraw sister." Bodie began - vainly attempting to appear non-nonchalant. "You remember them - the two spinsters living in the cottage at the crossroads." Ray nodded his understanding while silently spreading jam on a muffin. "The ladies agreed to watch Halley for us if work got too long." Continued Bodie as he buttered a muffin for Halley, who was patiently waiting at his side and put lemon curd on the one for him. With gentle delicate teeth, Halley took the offered food from Bodie's hand and happily munched away.

"You shouldn't feed the dog from the table Bodie." Admonished Ray at the of Bodie's dog germs laden fingers went from plate to mouth and back to dog again.

"Why not? Would you prefer her sitting at the table? I think she could handle the biscuits and muffins all right, but she'd have problems with the tea, especially if you expect her to keep her pinkie in the air as she drank."

"Of course not you fool. And the only finger I'd extend drinking with you, wouldn't be my pinkie. You're going to spoil her."

"She needs a little of that I believe." Answered Bodie lovingly looking down at the dog and feeding her another morsel.

"Just be careful partner or she'll be ruling you before too long."

"Never happen Doyle - I'm me own man - no one can manipulates me or tells me what to do." Said Bodie confident in his status.

"That's lovely Bodie. Now get up and help me with this mess. Then I want you to fix that broken latch on the garden door before we get more boarders. When you Finish that, we need more firewood chopped, stacked and brought in."

"Okay". Replied Bodie getting up. Noticing the smirk on his partner's face he added, "but *only* because *I* want to."

"Of course Bodie, of course. Wouldn't have it any other way." Replied Ray still wearing the same expression.

Before Bodie could make another comment the phone rang cutting him off. Being closer and hoping to avoid his lover's wrath, Ray grabbed the receiver first.

"5984"

Bodie watched Ray's expression as he spoke and listened. He didn't need to hear the conversation to sense it was work and trouble. His stance became tense and ready. Silently sitting at his feet, Halley adopted the same.

"We'll be right there Murph." Were Ray's final words as he replaced the receiver and looked up at his partner and answered the unspoken question. "Murphy's got word of some ex-KGB guy after the Cow and Miss Walsh."

"So"

"So, he's tried to get Cowley, but the old man's left for the day."

"Did Murph try his club or flat?"

"No, seems the Cow went out to Runnymede - something about dinner with Miss Walsh and Sharron."

"Well that's good then - he can warn the two of them at the same time and take precautions."

"Murph couldn't get through to her house - phone's out of service..." Bodie was going to interrupt again, so Ray held up a hand to silence him. "and, just as he was going to call the car and see if Cowley took a driver, Tomroy called in a May day saying he was down and Alpha was in trouble."

"Hasn't Vic been playing chauffeur to Cowley since almost fucking up the Wallace operation?"

"The one in the same. That's why Murph called everyone in. He thinks it all has something to do with the info you got last week from your Irish source about the Fiddler and that lost crate of plastic explosives the army misplaced last month. Add that together with that spotting of Martapopov at Heathrow, well the acting Controller thinks it all adds up to trouble in Runnymede."

"Martapopov? Why is that name familiar?" Inquired Bodie as he searched his mental storage banks and drew a blank.

"He was part of that Dawson debacle, only at the time we didn't know. We learned about him last year when he was still in a Russian prison. His constant threats and promises of what he'd do to Cowley and the Ministry were loud enough for one of our people to make a note of it."

"He's not in the slammer anymore?" Asked Bodie keeping up the conversation while changing into work clothes.

"Yep, and his first stop was merry old England. - Bodie where's my holster?" Ray was looking under the bed.

"In the top drawer."

"How did it get there?" He inquired, scratching his nose from the dust bunny attack he's just met under the bed.

"I put it there. You left it on the chair, as usual." Answered Bodie as he quickly strapped his on over a black cotton polo.

"Oh. Makes it easier and quicker to find if it's laid out."

"Not when you bury in under a weeks worth a dirty clothes it isn't."

"They aren't dirty clothes - they're in-betweens."

"Oh, excuse me, how could I forget - the dirty ones are normally on the floor." Bodie's reply was intentionally sarcastic. Ray's household habits were still a point of contention between them.

While the two men were talking and changing, Halley had been quietly laying in the middle of the bed watching them like a spectator at a tennis match. It wasn't until they were ready to leave that they noticed her.

"No time Bodie." Commented Ray to Bodie's unspoken question.

"She'll be good, won't you girl?" Patting Halley's head and looking seriously, Bodie added, "This is a test darling and I'm trusting you to be good and not get into mischief or make a mess. If you do, Uncle Ray will have both our arses. Now you have food and water in the kitchen. - Okay sweetie?"

Halley barked twice and licked his hand in reply. Bodie smiled and seemed satisfied, while Ray rolled his eyes and pictured puddles and surprises waiting for their return.

"Right now." Said Bodie as he went and stood next to Ray. "Next stop the garage."

Focusing on the modern abstract painting of three triangles placed on the wall for this purpose, the men used it as a focal point and concentrated on where they were to transport. It took an intense concerted effort to do it, but with each trip they found the endeavor was getting less and less difficult.

Bodie began to feel the familiar tingling in his fingers and toes as he started to de-materialize. Next to him he could feel Ray in the same state. Then, just before the process was complete he heard Ray scream in pain and call out Sharron's name amidst the background of Halley barking in fear.

The momentary lapse of concentration made Bodie re-materialize in the boot of his car instead of the driver's seat. Disorientated from the trip - the darkness and confining space added to his confusion. Reason and comprehension came back in seconds and he began yelling Ray's name. With his accentuated strength he kicked open the boot lid, scrambled out of the car and ran over to Ray's vehicle- empty. Crying out at the top of his lungs he called his partner's name as he desperately searched the garage trying to find him. Remembering his own ride, he ran back to Ray's car and ripped open the boot lid - it was empty too. Then a sudden flush of panic washed over him, grabbing his bowels in a icy grip and making his knees feel like jelly. He realized that he no longer could feel Ray's presence - that special warm glow they'd shared since acquiring their powers. Bodie remembered Ray's description of what happened after he'd gone beyond the protective barrier of the City and almost froze the death. The empty feeling Ray described after losing him matched what he was experiencing now and it sucked.

Ray was gone, lost in.... Bodie couldn't finish the thought. The unthinkable idea of his partner, his lover stuck out in some inter-dimensional limbo was too frightening and all too possible.

Chapter 4

Vic Tomroy sat on the bonnet of his bosses late model sedan and scowled at the brightly lit house across the circle driveway.

It was an incredibly dark night - a new moon and heavily cloud covered. The only light came from the burning orange glow on the tip of his cigarette. Another gust of chilly late spring wind blew down his jacket, prompting him to turn up the collar against it.

"Bloody fucking Cowley." He muttered aloud and wiggled his butt on the hard surface seeking a more comfortable position.

Vic was a new member of the squad, two months to be exact and already he was at the top of Cowley's very long shit list. The distinction was earned, but Tomroy was one of those types that think nothing was ever their fault and if an error occurred it was the result of someone's else's mistake. Despite his excellent past record with the Met - the reason Cowley chose him to begin with - he wasn't cutting it in CI5. Also, Cowley didn't like him personally, something very rare for him and because of this he was trying to be fair and give the man a chance.

His latest foul-up happened the other day when he went to sleep during a stake-out. Normally an agent could get away with that - providing they were lucky enough if nothing happened. Not Tomroy. As he slept, the tape recorder didn't and very important information laden conversation was delayed in being reported. The three and a half hour gap caused a lot of fuss in the morning making more work for other agents involved in the case and almost blew the whole operation. Luckily for Vic, the squad was still able to successfully complete it. If not, he'd probably be back on the force but this time walking a beat in Paddington instead of being Cowley's chauffeur for the next three weeks.

"Bugger 'im" Thought Vic angrily. I'm a trained agent, not a bleeding driver. All day long he'd been ferrying Cowley around London, now instead of calling it a night so he could go home and catch the football finals on the box - he was out here in "Runny-fucking-mede, waiting for his boss to eat dinner and get a little from his lady friend. His was incensed at the situation and frustrated when Cowley told him to wait outside until he was finished, no matter how late it got. Vic almost drove off leaving the old man stranded behind, but he didn't. He knew it would mean his job - a job in spite of all the unfairness of it, he desperately wanted.

Lighting another cigarette, he jumped down and went back into the car. Cowley didn't like the smell of smoke in his car so Vic opened the window. Turning the ignition key to battery, he flicked on the radio and tuned it into the game. If he had to wait, he might as well be entertained plus he had a tenner on his home team, Manchester.

With the roar of the crowd almost drowning out the game announcer bellowing from the speakers, Tomroy never heard the light crunching sounds of footsteps on the gravel drive. The arching flash of silver caught his eye as the eight inch knife blade was stabbed down into his chest, impaling him to the soft velour car seat.

As the crunching footsteps slowly walked away towards the house they were joined by two others sets. This time the shouting sounds of the announcer saying, "Manchester scores! Manchester scores! Game Over!, Manchester wins! " - overshadowed the footsteps.

Gasping in surprise and shock, Vic's hands went to his chest and grasped the handle of the imbedded knife. What his mind didn't believe, his fingers convinced him of. Groaning and fighting the darkness of unconsciousness, he reached out with his right hand towards the two-way radio. His blood stained fingers managed to grasp the mike and he carefully brought it up to his lips -afraid it might slide from his slippery hand he brought his left hand up for support causing another spasm of pain to course through him. With a concentrated effort, he depressed the talk button.

Blood was quickly seeping into his lungs and his voice gurgled. Bright red foam oozed from the corners of his mouth as he spoke, "May..day....May..day... 10.8 down.... Repeat..10.8 knife... Cow..ley...Al..pha... in danger..."

The mike slipped from his hands and fell to the floor before bouncing up again like a demented bungee jumper. His lifeless arms dropped into his lap as he went sideways - his body weight pulling the knife from the seat and freeing his form. As his sightless eyes stared forward, blood poured from his back soaking and blending in color with the burgundy upholstery. His last thoughts were regret over not going to be able to collect his winnings from Lucas, a Liverpool fan and loser.

George Cowley was standing at the drinks cupboard pouring a single malt for himself and a Tanqueray and Tonic for Elizabeth. when the front door flew open and three armed men burst into the room. Acting on the instincts of a seasoned soldier, he flung a drink each into two of the men's faces and himself into the third. Years of retirement and civilian life cost Elizabeth a few important moments with hesitation before she dropped down for cover.

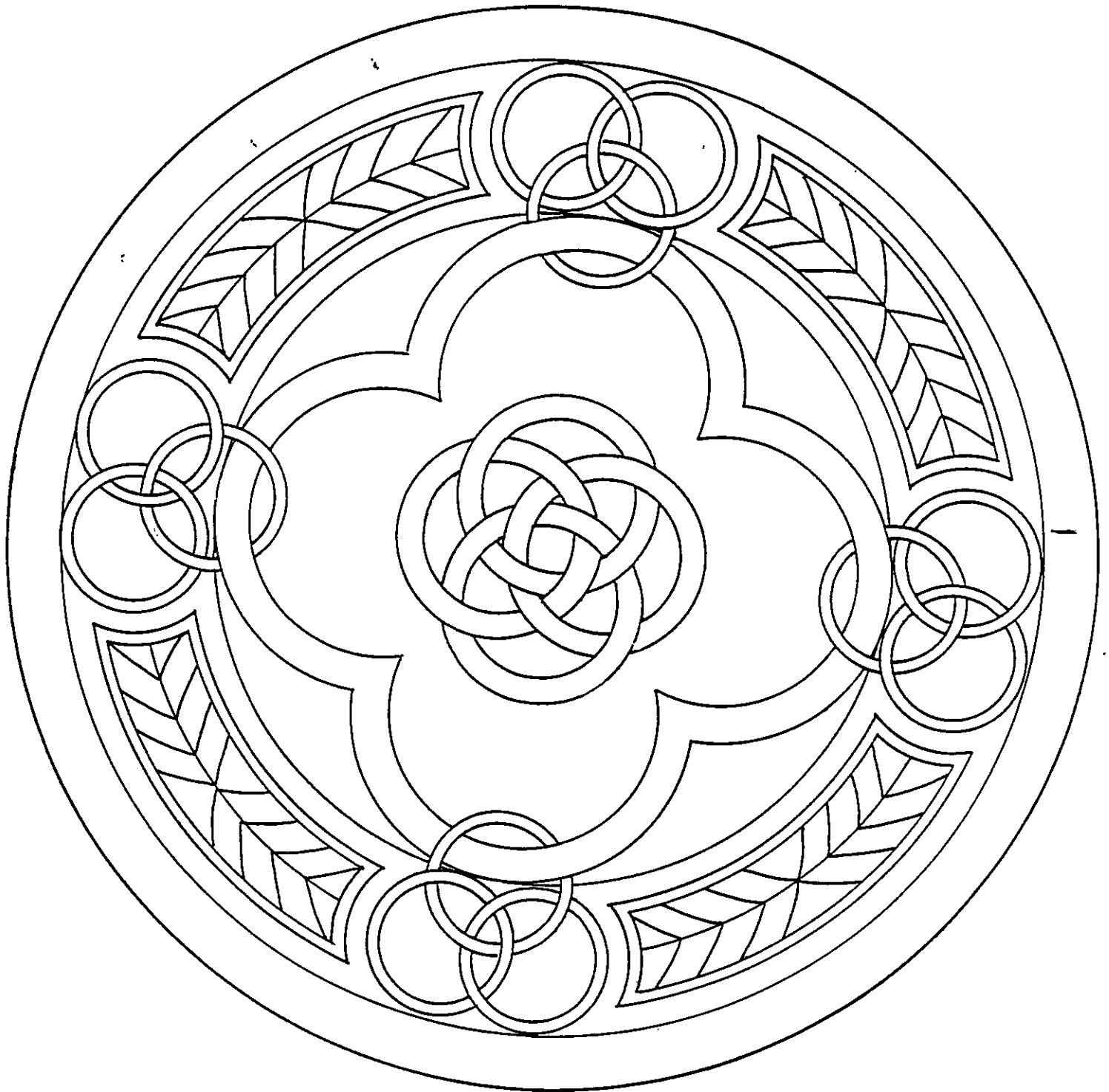
As George connected with the intruder the readied assault rifle he was caring discharged spraying the drawing room with deadly bullets. George and the intruder fell to the floor in a jumble, but just as he got the gun away from the overweight and out of shape man, he felt the hard cold muzzle of a gun pressed to the back of his neck followed by, "Easy does it, Gov'ner"

Cowley froze and put his hands up at the elbows. He was still on the floor, face down. The fat man he'd tackled was wheezy heavily to his left and he could hear him struggling to get up. Daring to look up for the first time, Cowley stared at the man holding the gun on him. At the sight of Sean McCaskey's face, he felt a surge of icy dread surge through him. He knew that face, everyone in anti-terrorist forces did. It was most wanted, but right now it was the one he least wanted to see.

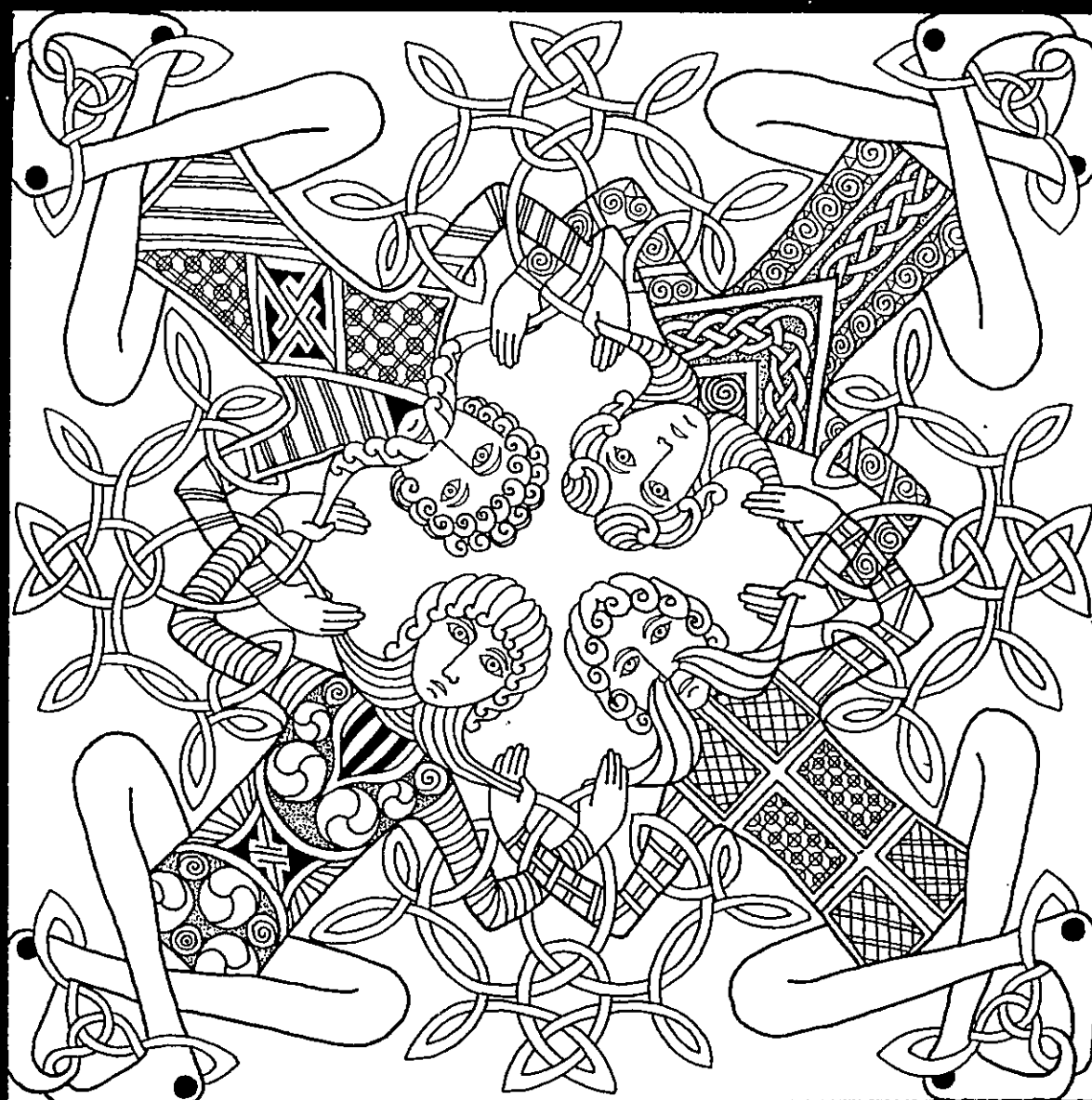
Carefully surveying the rest of the room as well as he could in his position, George's gaze finally came to rest on Elizabeth's sprawled unmoving figure laying on the floor next to the fireplace by a large wing-backed chair. At the sight of her blood stained face and the spreading crimson splotch on front of her yellow silk blouse, Cowley gasped and cried out her name, "Elizabeth!"

McCaskey snickered, while the winded Martapopov fond enough air to laugh, a loud maniacal laugh that echoed throughout the quiet room.

To Be Continued.....

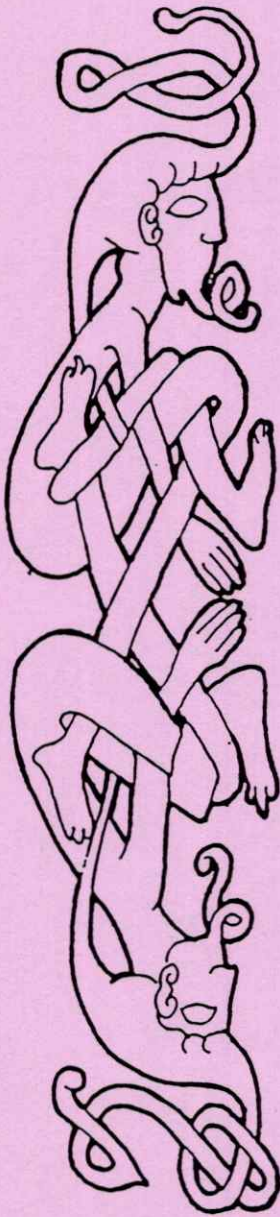






First Night

by *Taillader*



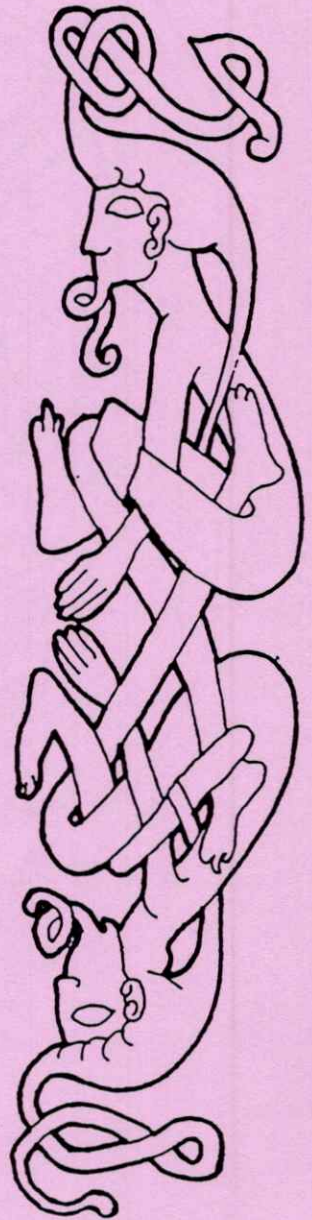
Night creeps in
the shadows grow
Open wide and embrace them.

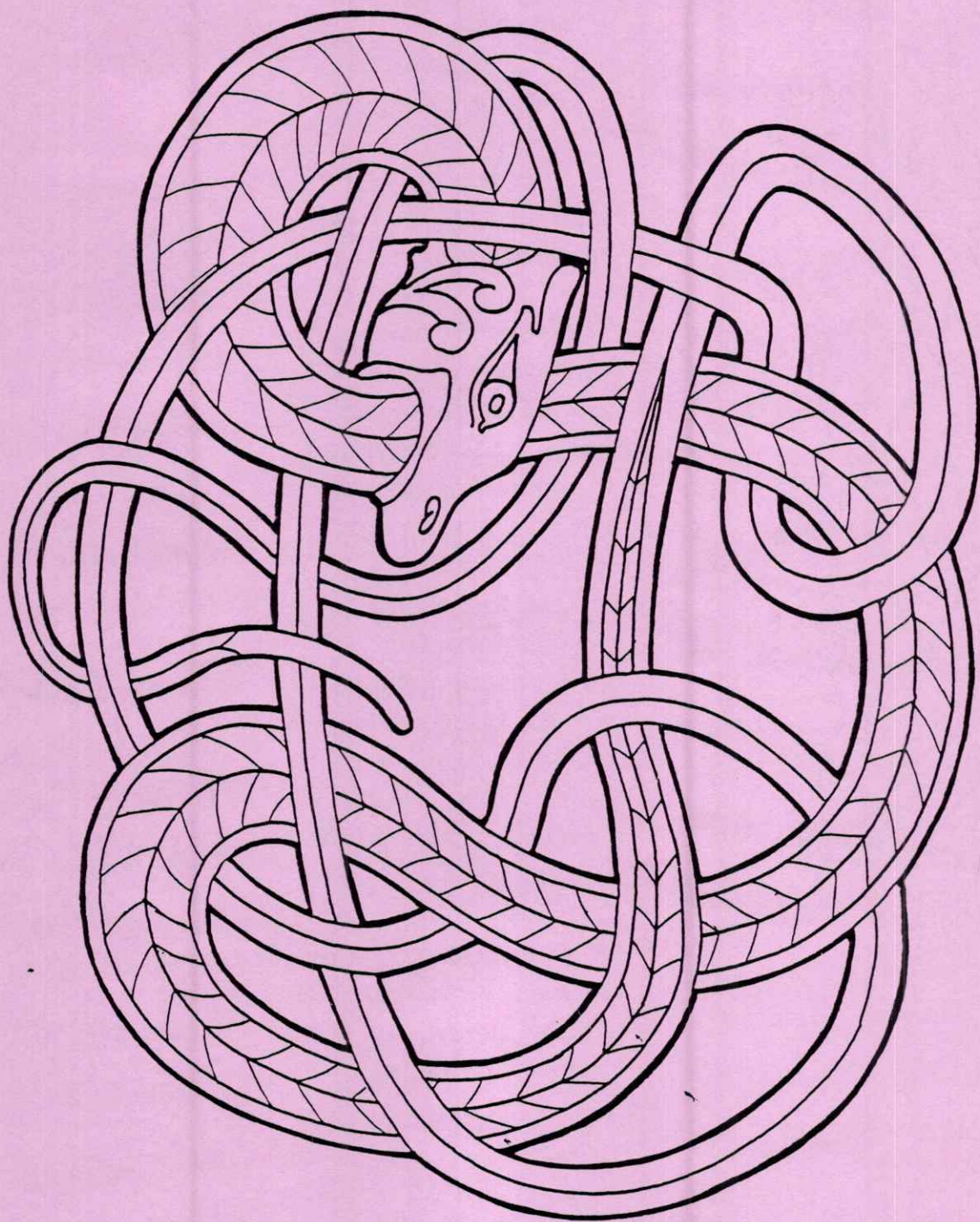
Moon rise -
Time to fly
A midnight feast waits us.

Warm flesh
so soft to the touch -
a small lick to taste.
Salty sweat rims
the sweet drink.

Life flows into death
from him to me.
His dreams are now mine.
His life is now mine.
His soul is lost and
I have claimed him.

To take and to give.
To have and to hold.
What was mine
will soon be his.
A bite for life as
immortality wells
from me to him
He is mine
Forever.





24 Hours In Which To Die

by s.m.w

The tall, elegantly-clad blond man smiled lazily as he moved smoothly through the crowd of well-dressed party goers. With a crystal glass of sparkling wine held negligently in his hand, he wandered from one room to another, occasionally taking a sip and smiling aimlessly at the people he passed. Someone watching him might have observed that he was either looking for something, or someone, or maybe he was running away from it. The laughter flowed around him; not reaching him, touching him or changing him in any way.

He glanced around, greeting people only when they acknowledged him first. And that was quite often, as he looked every inch the charming aristocrat he was. The only incongruity was his length of full, curled, blond hair. It only served to enhance his striking appearance. It made him seem even more remarkable, as the rich have always aspired to attain a certain androgyny. He was especially admired here as he fitted in easily with this stylish crowd. These were his peers, his friends. Every one of them special in their own way. Some used money for attention, some flaunted power, and others still were using a potent combination of their good looks, youth, and sex to draw people to them. They were addicted to excitement, temptation, and exploitation.

The blond man noticed that, as always at Richard's parties, there were a few new players and plenty of new prey in attendance. Dorian, the Earl of Red Gloria, found it all rather boring. He was here because he was feeling lonely, and here he knew he could find company.

As he wandered, he recalled that first rush of excitement he had felt upon discovering this unusual group made up of mostly gay men. Hed tried everything he was offered; he had done it all, but the thrill and the novelty had soon worn off. And now he found it all quite tiresome.

That was when he had started his own more serious forays into new entertainments to keep himself amused. What would these people think of him if they knew what he really did? Would they admire or despise him? A few, he knew, were unknowingly attracted to him by the danger they felt surrounded him. As Lord Gloria, he was known as an avid art collector, investor, a world traveler, and one of the smart set -- but as his alter ego, Eroica, he was the head of an international gang of art thieves. He planned and carried out daring feats of larceny, took incredible risks, proved that there was no such thing as an impossible theft. Everyone here would recognize the name Eroica, some of them even admired him.

Dorian smiled to himself as he reviewed the plan that he'd outlined to his men earlier that evening. It was brilliant in its simplicity. They'd agreed to put the plan into action as soon as Bonham, his electronics expert, had had a chance to go over the target to make sure that it was not equipped with a back-up alarm system. So easy. Almost too easy.

The rush that he got by pulling off a difficult burglary had been gradually diminishing in intensity. Dorian knew that part of the problem was the same old one; it was becoming too routine, too pedestrian, and even now it was in danger of becoming stale. Another reason he was beginning to lose interest in his hobby had to do with his recent jobs working alongside a certain NATO Major. The Major was in the spy business; and after having been enlisted by NATO for the use of his salable talents, nothing else had seemed quite challenging enough.

Of course, his greatest challenge to date was Major Klaus Heinz von dem Eberbach himself. But exactly what he did want from the tall, dark, German Major, he had never actually managed to put into words.

Dorian was young, charming, good-looking, rich and intelligent. But he wasn't happy. He could have slept with at least half the men here if he desired. There were even a few who would have worshipped him, if he allowed it.

Dorian wondered why he couldn't be content with all that he had on offer. Was it because the hot-blooded NATO agent haunted his dreams, bewitching him with his hard, green eyes? It was not difficult for him to imagine what it would be like if he was finally able to entice the elusive Klaus into his arms.

Once again Dorian paused to smile a rejection. He nodded to a group of handsome, younger men; all with long hair styles and carnations in their lapels. They had tried vigorously to include him in their group, but he smoothly slipped away and continued on into the next room.

Klaus would really shake this group out of their complacent attitudes. With them all living in their own little worlds, they have no idea of what the real world could do to them. I, on the other hand, have always enjoyed playing with fire.

The Lord of Red Gloria turned, his sweet Indian cigarette raised halfway to his mouth, and what he thought he saw caused him to freeze. That could not be possible. It must be his imagination working overtime. His pensive thoughts of the Major must have conjured up the raven-haired man's image, placing it into the dark corner of the large ballroom. Dorian was ready to shrug off his fantasy and seek another corner, and another's company; when he was sure that he heard the distinct sound of the Major's crisp, commanding voice. *What in the world would Klaus be doing in this den of iniquity?*

Dorian tried to move casually as he headed in that direction. He wanted it to look as if he were just happening past.

A young man with short perfect blond hair was lighting Klaus' cigarette for him. Dorian knew that he had been introduced to him sometime in the past. *What was his name again?*

Klaus' eyes were shaded by his long, black lashes, and his silky hair brushed the shoulders of his dinner jacket as he inhaled causing the cigarette he held between his lips to ignite. When Klaus' eyes looked up to meet his, Dorian wished that they were alone, instead of surrounded by the others. The Englishman raised a questioning eyebrow and just stared.

Almost immediately he was rescued from having to say anything by his friend Drew. The mousy, brown haired, young millionaire saw Dorian and drew him into the small group.

"Lord Gloria, you absolutely must come and meet Werner's new friend." Dorian remembered. *That's his name. German.*

"This is Helmut Seiger. His family is descended from barons. That is until...well, you know. Helmut, let me present Lord Dorian of Red Gloria. A good friend." While he watched, Klaus politely moved forward to take his hand. *He's good at this.* Dorian forced himself to snap out of his shock long enough to take it.

"Have we met somewhere before?" Dorian inquired sweetly, unable to keep the mischief from creeping into his voice.

"No. I am sure that we have not, Lord Gloria. I would have remembered." Klaus spoke with an accent that was far more German than Dorian had ever heard before. *What happened to his excellent English?*

"Oh please, just Dorian! And I was so sure. Have you ever been to Rome?"

"Nein. I have not had that pleasure." Dorian shook his head sadly while he was speaking.

"Then you must have a twin walking around somewhere in the world. I, for one, would never forget someone with such wonderful eyes." Klaus smiled frostily at him, catching him unaware by the cold beauty of it.

"Well, if you will excuse us, Dorian...." Werner said pointedly and taking Klaus' arm he started to move off. "We were just on our way to the buffet."

Dorian stared after them, unable to believe his eyes. Beside him, Drew sighed.

"Wonderful, isn't he?" his friend commented as they watched the two Germans move away. "Why don't I ever have that kind of luck?"

"And what kind of luck is that?" Dorian wanted to know.

"Come and have a drink with me," Drew coaxed, "and I'll tell you all about it."

They seated themselves on a comfortable couch in a not-too-dark corner, because Dorian knew that Drew enjoyed being seen with him. With his glass replenished, Drew was now ready to tell him the whole story.

"Werner just walked into The Crowbar one night, and there he was, just sitting there brooding and drinking - all alone. He was sitting at the bar, and it was his first time in the place. Can you believe it? And since it was much too early for the usual crowd to have showed up yet, no one had approached him. Werner just happened to go in, wanting a quick drink after work. Can you imagine? Of course he homed in on Helmut right away. I mean...after all, he *is* just his type. And because they are both German, it seems that they hit it off right away," he lowered his voice and leaned in closer to Dorian's ear. "I understand that they have been inseparable ever since."

Klaus, in a gay bar? Dorian tried not to sound too interested, "Is he living here?"

"I don't really know. But I think he's here on business."

Yeah, funny business. Dorian thought of a thousand questions he wanted to ask, but he did have to be careful not to arouse Drew's suspicions. "Have they....? Are they sleeping together?" That was the most important thing he wanted to know. Drew didn't seem at all surprised at the question, just at Dorian's interest.

"Well... I don't really know for sure. Unlike Werner's usual style of kiss and tell, he's being awfully closed-mouthed about it. Most likely it's because Helmut told him to keep his mouth shut for a change. I most definitely would have if he told me to! "

Dorian wanted to be alone for awhile, he needed to digest the information he'd just received. So he thanked Drew and kissed him on the cheek, making him blush. Then he went out for a walk on the stone palisade. The night was breezy and warm. *What is going on?* He took a seat on the stone wall, and cradled the glass of fine brandy he had picked up on his way out. He wanted to get drunk, but then again he realized that he should stay sober if he wanted to try to talk to Klaus once more. *Klaus must be on a job. Undercover. What's he after? Or who? It couldn't be Werner, could it? I knew there was some reason why I never really liked him. The man always seemed to be so... ineffectual. Could he be a double agent, with that smug attitude of his? Would Klaus have slept with him for information? Could he do such a thing? He had always made it clear he despised me for that very same quality.*

"There you are. I have been looking for you."

"And I have been finding out *all* about you," Dorian countered, because he hated being caught unaware. He hadn't heard Klaus as he came up behind him, and now here he was leaning on the cold stone of the wall next to where he sat.

"Eroica...", the Major began.

"Ah... So that's the way we're going to play it, is it? You keep my secret if I keep yours?"

"Yes, but.."

"You're here," Dorian gestured to the house, "on a job?" Dorian felt that he still couldn't look him in the face. But he could feel his warmth. *So near, yet so far.*

"Yes. I need help." Dorian knew that if he turned around and looked into those compelling, green eyes, he would give in and do whatever it was Klaus wanted him to do. He cursed himself for his weakness. Then he tossed his head, enjoying the feeling of the wind in his hair.

"Did you know I'd be here?" Dorian lowered his voice, causing Klaus to move closer to catch what he said.

"No, not for sure. I would not ask now, except that I don't know what else to do."

"What do you want?" The question was only a formality. He already had too many reasons why he would do it.

"Can you..." Klaus licked his dry lips, "flirt with me, and then take me upstairs?" Dorian's treacherous heart leapt, but Klaus was still speaking. *Did I miss something?*

"..... and then I need to search the study at the end of the hall."

"Richard's?"

"Yes."

"What has he got to do with it?"

"Not now. Dorian, turn around. I am trying to talk to you," his tone was deep and impatient.

Dorian complied without really knowing why. Now that he could see Klaus highlighted by a patch of moonlight the whole situation only felt more unreal. Very like the potent dreams he'd been having, whose details increased with each new night.

"These are my friends. Why should I help you?"

Klaus smiled a cold-blooded smile. "Are you sure?" he countered.

Dorian resisted the urge to close his eyes at the sight. "I know all about them, better the familiar than...."

"All?" Klaus' question made him uneasy. *What do I know about Werner? I hadn't liked him enough to bother to find out. But, Richard? I have known him all of my life.*

"Come on," the Major ordered, and held out his hand offering to help him down off the wall.

Dorian heard someone approaching, so he let himself drop into Klaus' arms. *Seduce him I will. How can I not?* He put his arms around his neck and breathed in his favorite fragrance, essence of Klaus.

It was only Ray and Philip, and they smiled knowingly at the Major's back. And then they hurried off. *No doubt to inform Werner.* Dorian held that position for as long as he thought he could get away with it.

"You do know that you could have asked me for help in the first place?" He ran a finger down the lapel of Klaus' tux.

"It's too complicated. As you said, they are your friends. I was not sure if you would be interested." He hadn't moved away.

Dorian whispered in his ear, "If I was able to be with you, I would do anything." Then he indicated the pathway behind them. "Ray and Philip will be on their way to inform on us."

"What now?"

"Let's find another corner." He led and Klaus followed him.

Dorian scooped a couple of champagne glasses off a tray as they passed it and he pressed one on Klaus. The Major's eyes flashed green fire as he took it. *Is he angry, at me? At the situation?*

"Come, sit here." The Englishman patted the empty space next to him on the couch as he sat down. "Come and talk to me," he said loudly enough for others to overhear. Klaus sat.

Dorian leaned over him as he sat bolt upright, and he was unable to resist touching Klaus while he had the opportunity. His fingertips burned as they rested lightly on the soft material of his sleeve. Dorian searched his face. *He actually isn't going to run, or even leave, as he had so many times in the past.*

"Get on with it." Klaus impatiently whispered to him.

"Darling, why don't you try to relax? Have another drink." And with one finger on the bottom of his glass Dorian tipped the champagne into Klaus' mouth. He drank deeply. *I hope he hasn't had too much of this already.* "You're incredible. I have never met anyone quite like you before."

"And I you," Klaus answered, startling him. Placing one of his attentive talented hands on the Major's knee, he slid it slowly up his hard thigh. And Klaus didn't shove it away. It was becoming harder for Dorian to ignore the undercurrent of pleasure that he felt was flowing between them.

"Would you like to get to know me better?" Dorian hoped that he appeared coy to anyone watching. He knew that if Klaus would just look he would discover much more.

"Yes. Can we..." He glanced around. Dorian stood up.

"Come with me." Taking his hand, Dorian pulled him to his feet. Klaus stayed right by his side, encouraging him to take another liberty. So he slid his arm around the Major's waist and leaned against him. As they went up the stairs, he noticed Drew standing there staring at them with his mouth open.

Dorian chose the room at the end of the hall; the one nearest to the study Klaus had mentioned. As he shut the door, the Major turned on the radio. *How did he know where it was? Had he been up here before?* Klaus was back listening at the door.

Dorian sat down on the bed and resisted the urge to lie back. After a minute the Major joined him there.

"These rooms..." Klaus whispered into his ear, causing shivers of delight to course down his spine, "are they wired?"

"They never were before."

"Too much activity in the corridor. I'll have to wait."

"I could go for you. After all, if I get caught they won't be nearly as suspicious."

Klaus shook his head 'no'. "I have involved you too much as it is."

"What's changed? Why is this any different? You never hesitated to involve me before."

"I did not want to. I had no choice."

Dorian said tragically, "You never wanted me around." They were so close they were almost touching.

"Not on the job, no. You are not trained for it."

Dorian was becoming extremely uncomfortable here alone with Klaus. All he could think about was what the room was normally used for. He turned toward him, wanting to ask about Werner, but the words caught in his throat as he met piercing green eyes. Klaus was staring steadily at him, only a breath away. Dorian closed his eyes, forgetting the question as he gathered his courage to reach for his heart's desire.

Abruptly, the Major got up and went to check the hall. He waved the 'all clear' sign at him. Dorian crept up behind him to look out. Klaus closed the door and, turning to him, he ordered, "Stay here."

As he left; Dorian stayed, but he didn't have to like it. *Why won't Klaus trust me to find whatever it is he's looking for?* He paced about the small bedroom, agitated. *Had he been up here before? And slept with Werner?* Glancing at his watch, he realized that Klaus had already been gone for twenty minutes.

Hearing a door slam and male laughter in the hall, he went to investigate. Peering through the crack in the door, he saw Richard giving Drew a pat on the behind. Then they separated, Drew to the stairs, and Richard came back down the hall towards his study. Dorian opened his door a bit wider ready to intercept his friend as he came by. But it was too late. Klaus was just now coming out of the study door.

Dorian flung the door all the way open, and pounced on Klaus, ignoring Richards presence.

"There you are, darling! I hope that you're not too drunk. I said the next to the last door, not the last one! Come on...." He started to pull the NATO man back to the room. *Oh hell, what's the name he's using?* As they turned around they bumped into Richard. Klaus stumbled and let Dorian catch him.

"What in the world are you up to now, you minx?"

"Sorry, Richard. Just having fun. What else would one do at your parties?"

"I see you have managed to capture the attention of Werner's cold friend. Congratulations. He never looks at anyone else. I suppose you had to get him blinding drunk first?"

"It must be the blond hair," Dorian countered. Richard snorted. "Well as much as I'd like to stay and chat with you, Richard..." He raised an eyebrow meaningfully, and helped Klaus to their still-open door.

"By all means. Dont let me stand in the way of your pursuit of fun. Dorian threw him a mock glare and shut the door firmly.

Now what? he thought as he turned to find Klaus stumbling to the bed. Dorian watched as the dark haired man lay down and fling an arm over his eyes. Going over to the bed he sat down careful not to touch him. *Could he really be drunk?*

"It wasn't there."

"What wasnt?"

Klaus sighed and Dorian waited.

"How long do we have to remain here, before we can leave?"

Dorian shrugged, not wanting to answer, forgetting that Klaus wasn't looking at him. Finally he answered, "Should be about an hour but... If we don't let Richard catch us we can leave sooner." Just a little longer. Dorian let the silence stretch.

"Do you have a car?" Klaus asked finally.

"Yes. Do you need a lift?"

"I came with Werner. Yes."

"I'd be happy to. But you had better tell me what all this is about hadn't you? Maybe I can find it. I am rather good at that sort of thing you know."

"Dorian..." He dropped his arm to look at him. "All right. I need to find a copy of a poison antidote." *Poison.*

Klaus held up a hand effectively halting his questions.

He would wait.

"Codename: the Red Death, or C3-N2. It was invented by the Russians. It is a contact poison easily absorbed through the skin. They are threatening to distribute it. Spread it around Victoria Station. Thousands of people might die, and I can't find the formula. I have been working on this for weeks and I thought I had it figured out." *He sounded frustrated, and something else, depression? He should be angry.*

"As soon as I get out of here, I have to pass along what I do know to my men. They have a chemist on standby, and I have nothing to give them." Again he paused, and Dorian was reluctant to break the silence. It was unusual enough to have Klaus opening up to him like this and he didn't want him to stop.

"The British government has already been informed, but since we do not have a firm date as to when this might happen, they don't wish to cause a panic with warnings or by closing the station. The Russians would only choose another target anyway."

"What made you think Richard has anything to do with it?"

"Something I overheard. But it looks like I was wrong."

"Tell me."

Klaus did. It appeared that the Russians were demanding the release of their agents captured by NATO earlier this year. They were now being held in England.

"...how come it's up to your agents, to NATO? What about MI5?"

"They are working on it. But they are looking in the wrong place. If you want to help, it will be up to you and my staff."

Dorian raised his eyebrows in surprise. "What about you? It's not like you to give up so easily. Actually it's not like you to give up at all!"

"I don't want to. I have to." He could hear the repressed anger in his voice.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Dorian, the poison, I've touched it."

"What are you saying?" Dorian shivered, he didn't want to believe it.

"I'm dying. It's been over 48 hours. I have all the symptoms, the doctors confirmed it. I have," he checked his watch, "less than twenty-four hours left. And the last few I won't be rational. Dorian, are you listening?"

"You can't die."

"Didn't you hear a word I said?"

"I won't let you."

Klaus sighed. "Dorian, come here," he said rather too gently for him. Dorian studied him closely. Could he really be about to lose him? He moved closer but refrained from throwing his arms around him followed by himself. Instead his mind was working overtime. There must be some hope, something he could do.

"How long do we have? How late can the antidote be administered?"

"I have been informed that they believe, as long as its given before the final stage, that in all likelihood it will be reversible." Klaus sat up. "Let's get out of here."

He stood and Dorian caught him as he swayed. "Are you..?"

"I'm fine", he answered bitterly. *He won't admit it but he needs help.* Dorian clung to him for dear life, unwilling to acknowledge that he may never be able to do this again.

The were lucky and met no one on their way to the car.

Dorian was pulling down the long drive before Klaus thought to ask him where they were going.

"The estate. You can stay there until.." He didn't want to think about it, let alone talk about it.

"Until, I need to be removed to a hospital. Yes. All right. Danke. I would appreciate that."

A wasted hour later, Dorian turned into his own drive just as the sun was coming up over the park. It promised to be a beautiful day. And it might be Klaus last. Would the headstrong Major be alive to see the sun come up tomorrow? The Earl of Red Gloria checked his watch. It was 5:38 AM. He had less than twenty-three hours to live. Twenty in which to get him the antidote. Dorian started his own mental countdown. And then to keep his mind off of what life would be like without Klaus, he started making lists. There was plenty for all of them to do.

He installed Klaus in his own room, it was the most comfortable and he couldnt bear to deny him even a little bit of comfort. The Earl rushed around giving orders as Klaus contacted NATO to update them. His men wanted to come and see him, and instead of letting them, the Major put them in contact with Dorian. He was leaving it up to him to keep them busy.

After settling that, and his household, and instructing Bonham to temporarily shelve their latest project, he went back to Klaus' room. For lack of anything else to do Dorian nervously patted Klaus' pillows.

"Don't fuss", he snapped, frowning at him.

Dorian sat down on the chair that earlier he had placed next to the bed. "Oh God, Klaus..."

"I don't want your sympathy. *You* offered help."

"Jones is organizing the men, and A and Z are on their way. Klaus, I have my own doctor on the way also".

"I don't want a doctor. Why do you think I'm hiding here? I just need a little rest. Leave me alone for an hour."

"All right, but if you need me, I'm right downstairs."

"I'll ring", he said sarcastically. Dorian was reluctant to leave but he knew that Klaus wouldn't close his eyes until after he left.

Outside in the hall Dorian checked his watch. It was 6:36. Twenty-two hours to go and he hadn't even started. He would never take time for granted again.

The meeting went well. At least now they had a plan. He felt much better for having done something. Klaus' men had been detailed to watch both Werner's and Richard's movements. James, after firmly being told that he could not ask the Major about his life insurance, had been sent to find information on Russian monetary movements, his own men were trying to find out what it was that the Russians really wanted, as they couldn't really expect the UK to give up its prisoners. Bonham was in the process of obtaining plans of the alarm systems for both the suspected men's residences, and the Russian and East German embassies.

Then the doctor showed up and Dorian took him up to see Klaus. It was 7:45. He was losing precious minutes. Dorian couldn't help but realize that he had never really known fear before. Pushing it to the back of his mind he did his best to act cheerful, he didn't want Klaus to see what dark fears haunted him threatening his reason.

"Klaus, this is Doctor Edwards," he introduced. The red haired man looked like a doctor dressed as he was in an expensive three-piece suit and carrying the traditional black leather bag. "He is also a friend."

The stubborn Major just frowned at him, letting him know that he wouldn't stand for being babied.

"Major, I understand that you have been poisoned? If you can put me in touch with your doctor?" He glanced at Dorian for conformation. "A NATO one?"

The Earl nodded.

"I suppose I will have to won't I?" said the very obstinate Major.

"It's either that or I will have to take blood tests and start from scratch."

"Mark, come with me. You can call from the next room."

Dorian left the doctor talking on the phone to his counterpart at NATO and since he didn't understand a word of what was being said he went back to Klaus' side. The indomitable Major was sitting up drinking orange juice.

Dorian informed him what the others were doing. Now *he* needed a job, if only to keep the reality of situation from crashing down on him.

"Tell me from whom, or where did you overhear the information about Richard?"

"It was not about him, specifically. Just that his study was being used, at the parties, as a drop. I suppose the information could have already been picked up before I got there."

Dorian thought about it. "It's very likely. It would have been easier to get in there earlier in the evening, there is - less activity then." Klaus put aside his juice and began to get out of bed. "What are you doing?" He questioned with trepidation.

"Get me my clothes, will you?"

The fear pushed itself forward and into Dorian's voice, "Where are you going?" He couldn't bear not knowing where Klaus was.

"I am going to find and talk to the East German agent who provided me with my first clue," he called out from the bathroom. Klaus returned from getting the rest of his clothes; his pants were already on. "You can come along."

Dorian felt that he could breathe again as the tight feeling in his chest eased. *He isn't running away.*

"You shouldn't be running around. The doctors said"

"To hell with the doctors. It won't make the end come any faster and I can't just sit here and do nothing." Dorian had been so wrapped up in his own pain that he had neglected to see how Klaus felt about it. "This is not the way I imagined I would go out." He put the sweater on over his head. "I always thought it would happen on the job. That it would be quick and relatively painless."

Dorian had never thought about it. He didn't really ever want to be forced to think about it, he had always lived for the moment.

Klaus was at the door, so Dorian hurried to follow him. "Let me just pop in and tell Jones where we were going. He's coordinating everything from the study."

By the time he got out to the garage, Klaus was already seated in the passenger side of his green Rolls Royce impatiently waiting for him.

Dorian followed Klaus directions until they reached an upscale London club that he'd never been invited to. Klaus asked for Erich Neisser, and was told that he was expected in for breakfast at 9:00 AM.

They were shown to a small table and were sitting nursing cups of coffee when a short, wide, East German was shown to their table. The Major stood up to shake hands with him.

"Erich."

"Klaus. I didn't expect to see you again so soon," the East German's tone held reproach.

"It is important." Erich's eyes were focused on Dorian with disapproval.

"I see." He couldn't possibly, thought Dorian.

"This is the Earl of Red Gloria, a colleague." Klaus added the last part with emphasis. Dorian realized that Klaus had just traded him as a piece of information. He hoped to God that this man was worthy of the trust.

"Pleased to meet you, Lord Gloria."

"Dorian, please." He also shook his hand.

"Let's order, then you can tell me why I have the pleasure of your company."

Halfway through the eggs Klaus brought the subject up. He hadn't actually been eating; just moving things around his plate. Dorian lost his usually enormous appetite, he put down his fork to listen.

"Last time we talked, you mentioned, something about our friend's involvement with the Committee."

"Yes..."

"I need more."

"As I told you, he had been seen, having lunch." He gave Klaus a speaking look before continuing, "Since then we have discovered certain deposits, in large amounts of cash. In unreported bank balances."

"I see." Klaus thought it over. "Has he any hobbies?"

"Other than his attraction to men?" Klaus nodded. "No. Not that I am aware of."

Dorian assumed that they were talking about Werner. So he asked, "Where does he work?" "Here?"

"Of course."

"He is employed by the Southgate Corporation. He explains that his large amounts of cash were gained by gambling. Come to think of it he must have something up his sleeve, he's being too casual about this."

Klaus nodded. "He has a back door." To Dorian he explained, "An out."

"And must be setting up something big. He doesn't have enough money as yet. He bears watching."

"He is covered. I - we, have a man on him. Would you care to be informed of any unusual activities?"

"That would be fine."

"Too bad that we have to cut this short. Time is a bit of a problem. I am enjoying myself." Klaus reached for his wallet.

"My treat, maybe you can do me a favor sometime," the East German hinted.

"I'll return it now. Don't travel out of Victoria Station anytime soon."

"Really? How interesting. I must tell all my friends."

"Do that."

"Thank you for your help." Dorian said politely. All this spy talk was getting to him.

"You're very welcome Lord Gloria. Dorian." He shook his hand once again. "It has been a pleasure meeting you."

Back in the car they discussed what they had learned. It was beginning to look as if Werner really did have something more to do with it than they had previously suspected. It was hard for Dorian not to feel gleeful at the thought of Werner getting what he deserved and if he had anything to do with it, he would.

But remembering that Klaus' time was running out and that he might have had something to do with that, made him angry. *It was very likely that Klaus had slept with that betrayer, that traitor. Did Werner even know what he had done?*

Together they figured out that Werner might have had time to go upstairs for the formula, either when he left Klaus to go to the loo or when he used the excuse of leaving him to go and talk to some friends. *That would have been when the Major was able to get away and find me, to ask for help. Klaus must have suspected him all the time but was unable to find any evidence to support his suspicions.*

"Can we pick up Werner and force him to tell us what he has to do with all of this?"

"First of all," Klaus explained patiently, "he is a professional, you will have a hard time forcing him to do anything, and second, if he is one of the instigators behind this he will never tell us where the antidote is. And his friends will just continue on with the original plan. And thirdly, if we are wrong, it will cause relations with East Germany to worsen." Klaus jaw was set as he visibly restrained his anger.

"I see. So what we need is proof that he's involved."

"What we need is the antidote."

Dorian decided that what he wanted to do was search Werners apartment. To do that he needed the plans that Bonham should have by now, and the reports on his movements by Klaus agents. He glanced over at Klaus as the dark haired man continued to stare out the car window with a grim expression. *I should get him back anyway.* The strain of the outing showed plainly in the gray tint of his skin. *It's not enough. I can't lose him. What would I do then?*

By the time Dorian forced Doctor Edwards once more on Klaus, talked to G on the phone, gathered together the reports from Bonham to study in Klaus' room, the time had already reached 10:39.

The doctor told you to stay put, and I need to go and search Werners place. G said that he always goes out to lunch and that he's invariably gone by eleven.

Yes. *Ah, I'd forgotten that Klaus would know that fact about him.*

It is perfectly safe for me to go on my own. I have done it thousands of times.

"Dorian, I want to go with you."

"Look my darling, you're as weak as a kitten and I will be just fine. Get some sleep so you'll be awake when I return with my report," he smiled and couldn't possibly keep it out of his voice. Klaus didn't voice an agreement but then again he hadn't said anything else. Dorian waited while Klaus' eyelids drifted closed. Then on his cat-burglar feet went softly to the door.

"Dorian." He turned around to see that Klaus was wide awake. "Good luck."

To Dorian it was no problem at all to break into the modern apartment, the new locks were always much easier to pick than the older ones.

He started his search in the usual place first. The safe contained nothing more than a large amount of very tasteless jewelry and a hell of a lot of cash in American dollars. It was rather unusual but not very helpful.

He had decided to search the desk last, most people did not keep anything of value or importance in their desks. But since he wasn't having any luck elsewhere, it was his last resort. He sprung the lock quickly and was digging about in the contents of the bottom drawer when he came across some airline tickets. They had been issued by the Highgate Travel Agency. And Dorian knew that agency was owned by Richard. The folder contained two tickets to New York.

He sat down in the desk chair to think. As he did so his eyes fell on a framed photo of Werner and Klaus. He trembled as a small groan escaped his control. It hurt too much to look at the tangible proof that they had spent quite a bit of time together. He picked it up and would have dashed it to the floor if he wasn't too professional to leave such an obvious sign of his entry, instead he tossed it onto the desk.

Jealousy that ever since last night was lurking under the surface of his sanity blossomed into full blown malice. Dorian had no photograph of himself with Klaus. What did he have to remember him by? Not much. Klaus had never been the kind to give or keep mementos.

Damn. He slammed the drawer and went on to check the others. If he didn't keep his mind on the job, he would be regretting that for a very long time.

A few moments later he turned up a document written in Russian. Hoping that it wouldn't be missed, he folded it and put it into his pocket. Wanting to get out of there as fast as possible Dorian re-locked the desk and replaced the photograph exactly where it stood before he picked it up. He left the apartment unobserved, and re-locked the door.

Once again in the car, he checked his watch. It was now 1:00 PM; almost twelve hours had passed since Klaus had approached him at the party and asked for his help. Dorian wished that somehow he might be able to support him, comfort him in a more personal way. All Klaus wanted was for him to solve his case. And save hundreds of people. And Klaus' life.

Dorian debated. Should he drive immediately to Richard's, or return to the estate with the Russian document for Klaus to determine if it was of value? He was starting to think that Richard knew more about this than they did. And besides, he wanted to give the study the once over himself, just in case the Major missed anything. After all he had been quite ill when he had done his search.

It was hard for him to go back home, and it was almost more than he could endure to stay away. If Klaus was awake he was sure to be wondering where he was. He turned to car around and headed back to the North Downs.

In his bedroom, Earl of Red Gloria shared a lunch that consisted of thin vegetable soup with the NATO Major. For once they weren't discussing the case. Or bickering. It was a peaceful companionable silence. And if they didn't have such a dreadful threat hanging over their heads, he would have been content. The afternoon sun was shining brightly into the room. The birds were singing and the roses were in bloom. Dorian sighed, attracting Klaus attention.

"Well?" he asked. *Does he want to know what I found or why I sighed?* Dorian chose to answer the former.

"All I found was this. He handed over the folded document. Maybe you can tell what it says? My Russian is limited to speaking it."

"Some. I'll work on it. What else?" Eroica was gazing out the window, his thoughts on the photo of Werner and Klaus. "Come on Dorian, spill it."

"I came across two plane tickets, to New York. He also had an enormous amount of cash in American dollars." After Klaus didn't comment on that, he turned around to look at him, and questioning with a raised eyebrow, "It looks as if he's been planing a trip."

"Yes, it does." Klaus continued to study the Russian script.

Dorian wanted to ask what he knew about it. But he couldn't summon the courage. "The tickets were issued by a place of Richard's. I think that my next stop should be back at his estate."

Klaus put the paper aside. "I believe you're correct." *He's given up.* Dorian put the tray on the floor and went over to sit at his side.

"I'll find it. Don't worry." He picked up Klaus' hand and held it tenderly to his face. Klaus gifted him with a thin-lipped smile.

"I'm not worried. Not anymore."

"Don't give up."

"I never give up. You know that. What about my reputation?" Dorian smiled savoring the moment awhile longer, then he reluctantly put down the Major's hand.

"I should get going. There is a lot of work to do". But he couldn't move just yet.

"Dorian, I want to tell you ..."

"It doesnt matter." He stood up, he didn't want to hear this.

"I'm sorry that I have treated you so badly".

"Stop it! I won't listen."

"Dorian.."

"No, Klaus. I mean it. Then softer, Not now. Let it be." He had moved to the door in his panic. It was callous to leave it like this but he really couldn't face it now. "I'll be back as soon as I can," he said as he closed the door on that pale handsome figure who was watching him, asking for understanding.

Dorian leaned against the closed door and shut his eyes. *What am I going to do?* A few moments later he had once more regained control, he told himself he would deal with tomorrow when tomorrow comes.

Without compunction Dorian broke into the home of one of his oldest friends. It was a bit more difficult to search this house because he had to avoid the servants and he had a lot more hiding places to explore. Again he found nothing. Though, this time he sat down in the sitting room to wait for Richard to come home.

It was going on three when he turned up.

"Dorian, what are you doing here? Don't get me wrong its very nice to see you, but you never come here during the day."

"You may not be so happy after you find out what I'm here for."

"My, my. So serious. We had better have a drink." He held up a crystal decanter, questioning, "Sherry?" Dorian nodded his head. He might as well; it couldn't hurt. "Did you leave with Werners boyfriend last night?" He was crazed you know, when he couldnt find him. Richard brought the expensive glass over to him. "I understand that he has never gone off with anyone else before." He was being questioned.

"It is regarding Werners activities, that I need to ask."

Richard sat down. "I'll help you if I can."

"I want to know how deeply you are involved in this."

"And what might that be?"

"Richard you could be in real trouble. You had better tell me everything." His friend just frowned into his sherry glass. "A good place to start might be to explain why you allowed your study to be used as a drop by the Russians."

Richard looked up at that, scared. "I didn't. Not exactly. At first I thought it was just another game, you know, the type we used to play. But then I found out that Werner was working for the East Germans. By that time we had a thing going. I thought that maybe, well, maybe we would join forces. You know the sort of thing where we would play at being double agents, and work for England." He lit a cigarette before continuing.

"Well, he had me completely beguiled. He said that he was deceiving the Russians into believing he was on their side, but what he really was doing was extracting secrets for us. I fell for it. He was playing all of us for fools."

"If he is really working for the Russians, then why the plane tickets to New York?"

"You know about that?" Dorian tried out his best how not look. "He was to take the Russian's money and we were going to run."

"What happened?"

"Well, for one thing your friend Helmut did. Werner really fell for him hard. He assured me that Helmut was the one that was going to be leaving with him, and that I knew better than to say anything about it to anyone. I had committed treason and he would make sure that evidence was found incriminating me, if I caused any trouble."

"I'm sorry Richard."

"Humph." He stood up. "You're sorry. I made such a fool of myself." He poured himself another glass of sherry as he asked, "What are you going to do?"

"I will try to leave you out of it, if I can. What do you know about a Russian concocted poison called the Red Death?"

"I have never heard of it. Is it important?"

"I thought you'd say that. Let me put it this way, don't go into Victoria Station anytime soon."

"Oh my God. Do you mean to tell me that Werner had something to do with this?"

"You couldn't have known."

"How can I help?"

"You just have."

"Dorian, what do you have to do with all of this?" He had been waiting for the question. Richard was a quick study.

"I'm working for the good guys. That's all I can tell you." *And in this case, it's true.* "I had better go." He put his glass down as he stood up.

"I really loved him, you know. Funny how love makes you do things that you would never consider otherwise."

"Richard," Dorian said from the doorway, "You might be happy to know that Helmut is not going to go anywhere with him." *God knows, I would be happy to know if that were true.*

Dorian, realizing that he didn't have time to drive back to the estate, drove to the Regent instead. He left his car with the parking attendant at the hotel and went in to place his call. He needed to catch up on the reports that he was sure were piling up just waiting for him to get to them. But mostly he wanted the reassurance of hearing Klaus' voice.

First, he proceeded to get caught up with Werner's latest movements. He had made a stop at his club, it was a health club, and then he was seen outside of Helmut's apartment, twice. *Worried, is he?* His own visit to Richard's had also been noted by Klaus ever-vigilant men.

After letting Jones know that his next stop would be the Russian Embassy, he asked to speak to Klaus. As he waited, he wondered if he should ask him for the truth. *What if Werner had actually asked him to run away with him to the States? Had he considered it?*

"Klaus. It's me, darling. I just called to let you know that I didn't find anything much at Richard's."

"I'm not surprised."

"But, he did tell me what the plane tickets were for." Silence. "I understand Werner has been extremely persistent in his search for you." No reply was forthcoming. *Damn him.*

"If you aren't returning here, where are you going next?"

Dorian sighed. "I thought I would give the Embassy a go."

"Do you know what you are doing? That is a difficult choice if you're just looking for an activity."

"I always know exactly what I'm doing." *Except when it comes to you, my dearest darling.*

"Make sure you wear gloves," Klaus' tone was stern.

"I am remarkably careful."

"I wasn't talking about a thief's care. I was referring to the contact poison."

"Oh."

"Yes. Oh. Dorian, just come back."

"No problem, darling. I'm just like the bad penny, I always turn up. Be home for dinner. Kiss, kiss."

He rang off before Klaus could say anything to make him change his mind and give in to the pleading he imagined he heard in the German's voice.

The offices at the Russian Embassy were closed as it was after five. The outside staff had all left and the gates were locked. Dorian hoped that there wasn't a dinner or some such activity planned for tonight. It would make his job just that much more difficult. And this time it was a job. He needed to watch out for guards, dogs and he had a multitude of alarms to deal with. They were not in the habit of inviting in unexpected visitors to their little corner of Britain.

First, Dorian pulled on a pair of thin black leather gloves. He didn't have a large number of locks to pick so it wouldn't make that much difference, mostly it was the electronics that he needed to outwit. Or rather it was their designers' ingenuity he was pitted against. The Russians had some of the best masters of this craft, but in this case having worked for NATO held him in good stead. He was very familiar with this setup, his skill having been tested only last month when he had helped Klaus break into an installation equipped with the exact same system. He managed to deal with this one in record time.

Luck was with him, all seemed quiet, and there was no activity to be seen in any of the small offices. The search he conducted was long, arduous, and unfortunately a fruitless one. The two concealed safes he did find, contained a multitude of copies regarding military secrets that were being passed back and forth between at least five of the major powers. If he had found the formula for the antidote, he would have taken the other papers to Klaus as a present. As it was he knew that the dying man would not have approved of him setting the entire KGB into motion trying to find out who had the audacity to remove them.

Just as he finished locking up the last of the file cabinets, Dorian heard a sound in the hall. He turned out the desk lamp and stood with his back to the wall, listening at the door. This was when the Major's irascible presence would come in handy and he remembered why he normally refused to do this sort of job all by himself.

Two men entered the office next door to the one where Dorian had secreted himself. They were speaking Russian and Dorian caught a word here and there. He moved to the connecting door to listen. It seemed that they were discussing a traitor, and something about a double-cross. Dorian held his breath. *Could they be possibly talking about Werner?* A lot more followed that he was unable to decipher and then he recognized that they were talking about an East German agent.

I have got to get out of here. He checked the corridor. It was clear, but well lit. Slipping down the hall, he made his way to the side door where he'd left the alarm disconnected. He backed quickly as a guard making his rounds went to check why the camera covering the door wasn't registering. Dorian turned around and headed towards the back of the building and the kitchen, praying as he did that it was already after dinner and that it would now be empty. It was, but for a dishwasher diligently taking his time trying to do a good job.

The expert thief took a deep breath and moved without a sound across the room to the back door. He didn't let it out until he was safely on the other side.

Unscathed, primarily because they hadn't the foresight to release the dogs immediately and once more in the car Dorian drove as fast as he was able back to Klaus' side.

They were having dinner. It was 8:15 PM and there were only five hours left.

"You're not eating?"

"I'm fine, mind your own business."

Dorian sent him a skeptical look that passed easily over his head. He didn't want to maintain this difficult silence. "Do you want to see any of your men? They have been popping in and out all day asking about you."

"What and have them walking on eggshells around me? No, thanks."

"Don't be ridiculous, they care about you."

"I do not need their sympathy."

Dorian threw down his napkin. "They have been working around the clock trying to help you. As we all have."

"It's their job." Dorian stood up, angry, ready to walk it off. Klaus icy mask of indifference slipped and he continued, "No, I am sorry. I realize what it is you are all trying to do."

Dorian moved to the window as Peters came in to clear away the dinner tray. After giving Dorian's straight back a disapproving look he left with the almost untouched dinner.

"You know how much is at stake here, don't you? What you are doing is necessary." Dorian forced himself to give Klaus his full attention.

"I realize that," he voice softened.

"This document refers to a deal," he tapped the paper with a finger, "only I havent been able to discern any specific details. I sent a copy on, to be translated and decoded. But I don't think that there is much chance of us learning more from it. Other than the possibility that Werner is himself being blackmailed by the Russians."

"Whatever for?"

"Most likely it would be because of his homosexuality. That is one of the traditional threats." Klaus put aside the paper he held. "I seem to be repeating myself but I want to apologize to you."

"And it seems that I have to keep repeating myself also, telling you to let it drop."

Klaus closed his eyes and rubbed them. "I'm tired."

Dorian moved to his side. "Then rest." Dorian glanced at the clock on the bedside table. "I have to go."

"Where are you off to now?"

"Well, I thought I'd go and check with the men on lookout. And maybe I'll just pop into take a peak at Werner's health club. You never know, some people keep the strangest things in their lockers."

"You would know."

I don't know anything, at least not anything worthwhile. Pain crept up on him and twisted his insides. *I can't give up at this point. I wont.*

"Dorian, this may be the last chance we have to"

"Damn you, don't do this to me."

"Now whos running? Face it Dorian, I am dying. If I dont receive the antidote by 1:00 AM, I am as good as dead." Dorian closed his eyes tightly as he spoke trying to block out the pain. *I suppose it wont do any good at this point to deny it.* "Come back here. I have one more thing to tell you."

"What's that?" Bitterness twisted his voice and his heart.

Klaus stared at the ceiling while he sat in the chair next to the bed. "That I need to apologize for not telling you... For not letting you know ...that I ..love you."

"You cant mean that," his voice hushed, horrified.

Klaus finally turned to look at Dorian, his eyes asking for acceptance. "I have never been so serious in my life. I did what I did and said what I said to drive you away."

"I don't believe you!"

"I know how you live your life. I was convinced that, to you, I was only a diversion. I never for one moment thought you were serious."

"But now you believe me? How lovely." *How ironic.*

"Dorian.."

He couldn't stay still as conflicting emotions warred inside him, he paced across the room to the french doors. *How dare he come up with this now!* His vision blurred. *What the hell is he trying to do to me? Love me? How can he talk of love, and sleep with Werner?* "Damn you!" Dorian hit the wall with his fist and then hung on to it for support. You never gave us a chance. He hadn't realized that he had said that out loud until Klaus replied broke through his self-absorption and the confining bands of pain.

"Don't."

"Why ever not? I suppose I deserved it."

"I didn't want to involve you. I would have kept it from you if I could have."

"Isn't life wonderful?"

"Dorian, please..." Klaus was finally asking him for something he could give, he turned to face the man on the bed. The man he truly loved. "Come lie with me."

Even with the anguish he felt enveloping him almost completely, an invitation like that was impossible to resist. He was drawn to him like a magnet. *As if I could ever stay away.* Carefully he got onto the bed mindful of Klaus' state and lying along his side the old urge to hold him and finally possess him was too strong for him to ignore. Dorian held him with all his strength as if the strength of his fervor could help fend off death. And feeling a passion that he could not even begin to deny he closed his eyes and rested his head on his German lover's chest. *If only we had more time.*

But Dorian couldn't let things alone for long, his envy forcing him to ask, "You would have preferred to never have said anything? What about Werner? Did you love him?" Klaus turned his head away. "You owe me that much." Dorian felt Klaus wince. "After you're gone who will tell me?"

"Yes, I slept with him. Is that what you want to know?"

"I want to know why. I would have done anything for you."

He felt Klaus hand stroking his hair. "It was just sex."

"Were you going to go away with him?" He was unable to leave it alone as jealousy ate away at the little common sense he had left.

"What do you think?"

"I think that you should answer the question."

Klaus closed his eyes but the hand continued to move on his hair. He answered him slowly keeping his voice low, "I kept imagining long blond hair and the scent of your roses" and then stronger, "No. I had not even considered leaving with him."

"You give yourself away too cheaply."

Klaus opened his eyes to look directly at him. Staring into his cloudy green eyes Dorian wanted to lose himself in the unreality of the situation, so he kissed Klaus. He kissed him, and their first kiss was as passionate as he had imagined it would be. This might be the last time he would have the chance to do this, so he drew it out. *How is it that the fates designed for me to find such comfort in his arms, and at the same time feel such torment?*

Dorian forced himself to pull away. His heart was beating wildly as it tried to keep pace, he was breathing much too fast. That would have to keep him going for awhile.

As much as I'd rather stay here with you, I had better be going, he said breathless with regret. Only reluctant to break delicious contact Dorian kept a hand on his chest.

Klaus attempted to draw him back down. Dorian.. he whispered tenderly, tempting him to remain.

What does he expect from me? "Dum vita est, spes est," he said as he pulled free and stood up. Then he straightened his black pullover and fluffed out his hair where Klaus hand had smoothed it down. "I'll be back. Don't you dare die on me while I'm gone." And from the door he added, "Get some rest!"

"Dorian. Vorsichtig sein, Geliebter."

Werners health club was one of those ultra modern ones that was all chrome and glass. Dorian was expediently ushered in when he told them who he was and that he was interested in joining. He said he just wanted to take a look around. That statement caused a guide to be provided for him, one that he couldn't shake for a full half hour and then it was only because the man was called away to the phone.

Lord Gloria was most happy to continue his tour alone. The first place he headed was the locker room. *Thank goodness for Klaus spies.* They had provided him with Werners locker number. Now all he had to do was break in. And that part was a bit harder than it sounded because people continued to come in from the showers and out of the pool. Dorian put his back to the door and hoped that no one here knew Werner well enough to know which locker was the blond German's.

With the locker finally open, he began his search with a pile of sweaty gym clothes. His quick once-over revealed another type of locker key taped under a shelf. A key that looked to Dorian as if it might have come from a locker at, well, at Victoria Station.

He glanced at his watch, he didn't have enough time to go home and make sure that it checked out. If he was on the right track he would have to get whatever might be in that locker as soon as possible, and then get it to the NATO doctors. It might be his only chance. It might be Klaus' only chance. Pocketing the key he went to make use of a phone. He had to be right.

"Bonham, I think that I may have found something important. It could be a key to a locker at Victorian Station. I want you to check the records and find out what they look like and what all the other station keys look like, in case I am wrong."

"Do you want me to do the airports also M'lord?"

"Not at first, I'm fairly sure that it is a railway station key. It's an olderstyle."

"I'll get right on it. M'lord?"

"Yes, Bonham, what is it?"

"Ah, it seems that the doctor thought it best to move the Major to the hospital. He's been taken to St. Thomas. Doctor Edwards went with him and said he would stay there. M'lord, are you there?"

"Yes, my dear, I am still here. But I am going to the station to try that locker. I will keep in touch."

"I'm sorry, my Lord."

"Not now Bonham," he said and hung up. *What good would it do to let the pain take control of me now?*

Not knowing if this was even the right thing to do, he broke every motorist law on the books getting to the station. He almost ran to the indicated locker but he did manage to stop himself from rushing in without checking to see if it was under observation. *What if Werner shows up?* That stray thought gave him a germ of an idea.

He remembered to put on his gloves before having a go at the locker. The key fit. And the lock turned. The locker contained only a black artists portfolio. Dorian took it out, re-locked the door, and went to sit on a bench to open it. Inside was a sheaf of papers, mostly in Russian. Dorian's heart began to beat faster. *Could this actually be it?* He checked the pages carefully, there was something that appeared to be C3-N2. And a string of numbers and letters followed that. It was either the antidote or maybe it was the formula to make the filthy stuff.

Dorian ran for a phone. He called the house and informed Z about what he had, then he had him patch him into the NATO chemist that was on standby just waiting for something to do. After Dorian read, and re-read to him a few of the more important looking lines, he was told that he should get the papers over to the lab immediately. The Doctor guessed that it was what he needed but it would take time to have it translated and more time to make up a sample.

Dorian's next call was to the hospital to check on Klaus' condition. He had Doctor Edwards paged; he expected him to be excited when he told him what he had found.

"Please don't get your hopes up too high, it's going to take awhile to get it to him. Dorian, I am sorry to have to tell you this, but he slipped into unconsciousness about twenty minutes ago. It happened sooner than we expected. I don't know what else to say, except that I will keep you informed."

"Thank you Mark, for all you have done."

"I only wish it could have been more."

Spoken like a true physician. "I have to go." *Not now, not when we are so close. Hang in there my love.*

"Good luck," the Doctor said before hanging up.

He was to meet a NATO courier half way to the lab. When he got there, it was A who met him. Dorian took up a precious minute to ask A, and whoever else that would be able to make it, to meet him at the hospital later for a chat.

He had one more stop to make before he was able to go to the hospital and see Klaus for himself. He went to replace the key in Werners locker. It was a good bet that he would not yet have had a chance to notice that it was missing.

It was after 11:00 PM and visiting hours were long past. He didn't really even have a right to be here. Klaus was the only one who knew how much he was entitled to see him, but that didn't do him any good now. He paced and prowled the halls until Dr. Edwards took pity on him and sneaked him in for a few minutes.

Klaus was pale. And his breathing was shallow. And the hand Dorian held was so cold. Dorian could only watch as he slowly slipped away from him forever. His time to spend with him was over before he could even decide how he felt and then he was forced to leave Klaus' side.

But it was time to put his idea to a vote with the Majors agents. A, B, G, and Z, were there to meet him. So were James and Bonham.

"Sorry M'lord, I couldn't stop him," Bonham apologized for James presence.

"That's all right, dear." And then to his accountant, "James darling, please be a dear and go and find out how much, if any, money has been transferred out of the KGBs Swiss account and if it was converted to American dollars?"

"That will take me some time, are you sure that you don't need me here instead?" James said hopefully.

"No dear, please go do as I've asked, it's important."

James left reluctantly, dragging a battered leather briefcase behind him.

His little meeting with the agents went well. It became evident early on that they all heartily agreed with his plan.

Dorian stayed at the hospital all night.

It was 5:35 AM, and this time as Dorian watched the sun rise he knew that 24 hours had passed since he had watched the last one. He hadn't slept at all. He had dozed, slumped down in one of the hospitals uncomfortable plastic seats while he waited to hear the results; whether or not the formula he found was a valid one. They were fairly confident that it was, and four and a half hours ago they had administered the antidote to Klaus. And even though the Major was unable to view this most beautiful of sunrises, he was going to live to see another one. He had just been told by Mark. And it was one of the most extraordinarily wonderful things that he had ever heard.

Of course, he would not be allowed to see or speak to him until tomorrow. But all the medical staff were hoping for a full recovery. All he could do now was wait.

But he had one more thing to do.

The trap was set. Klaus men were in place. The East German agent, that Klaus had introduced him to, stood over in the corner of the busy trainstation. Dorian was leaning up against the same row of lockers that only last night he had opened to find the black leather portfolio. It seemed to the Earl that it all happened a very long time ago.

Agent A had just radioed in that their target was definitely on his way.

Werner walked into the station twenty minutes later, looking about him as he did. He didn't notice any of Klaus men and nor did he see Erich Neisser. The only one he did notice was Dorian, but by then was too late, Dorian had seen him first.

"Well hello, darling. What ever are you doing here?"

"Dorian. I could ask the same of you."

"I thought that I would just pop by and say good-bye to a friend."

"Well, I have to catch a train. So.."

"Aren't you going to get your things out of your locker?" Dorian inquired with a raised eyebrow, and pointed to the locker key he already held in his hand.

Werner started forward, maybe making to push past Dorian but Klaus' men were there first and grabbed his arms. "Dear, dear, It looks like that you have gotten yourself into a bit of trouble."

"What are you doing? Let me go."

"I'm sorry, Sir. You'll have to come with us, said Z."

"Who are you?"

"We are from NATO. If you will come this way?" Agent X pulled him to the door of Lost Luggage.

Dorian followed and with false concern he asked, "Maybe I can be of help? Haven't you met Klaus agents?"

"No, I have no idea who these men are. Can I see some identification?"

"I'll be happy to introduce you," Dorian said smiling as the agents pushed Werner into a chair. "As I was saying, these gentlemen are from NATO and Klaus' section. This is Agent Z and this is Agent X."

"I haven't done anything. NATO hasn't got anything on me."

"Well, there *is* the contents of your locker. But since that is no longer there.... No, I don't suppose they do."

"Where is this Klaus anyway? Why doesn't he come here himself?"

"He's in hospital, no thanks to you. He touched the poison."

"I have no idea what you're talking about." But a bit of his bravado slipped and he started to sweat.

"Not even a little bit concerned? I'm surprised. I thought you two were very close. It appeared that way to me at the party."

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm sorry, I forgot. You only know him as Helmut."

"Helmut," he whispered the name under his breath. What has he got to do with this? Where is he?" his tone implied a threat, "What have you done with him?"

"I told you," Dorian said with mock patience, "He's in hospital." Dorian remained quiet for a minute to let the information sink in.

"Helmut works for NATO?" Werner asked amazed, and to himself he added, "Was I just a job?."

"Ah, that would be telling." Dorian smiled coldly.

"I would never have hurt him. And all that time..." he trailed off softly. "Is he going to be alright?"

"He will be fine. Now. But you'll never see him again."

"None of you can do anything to me. You don't have any evidence."

"Actually, I thought of that. No, NATO can't and England can't. But I think that he can."

At Z's signal, Erich stepped into the room followed by two other East German agents. They relieved Z and X of guard duty, and then pulled Werner up out of the chair.

"Have a nice trip home," Dorian said sweetly.

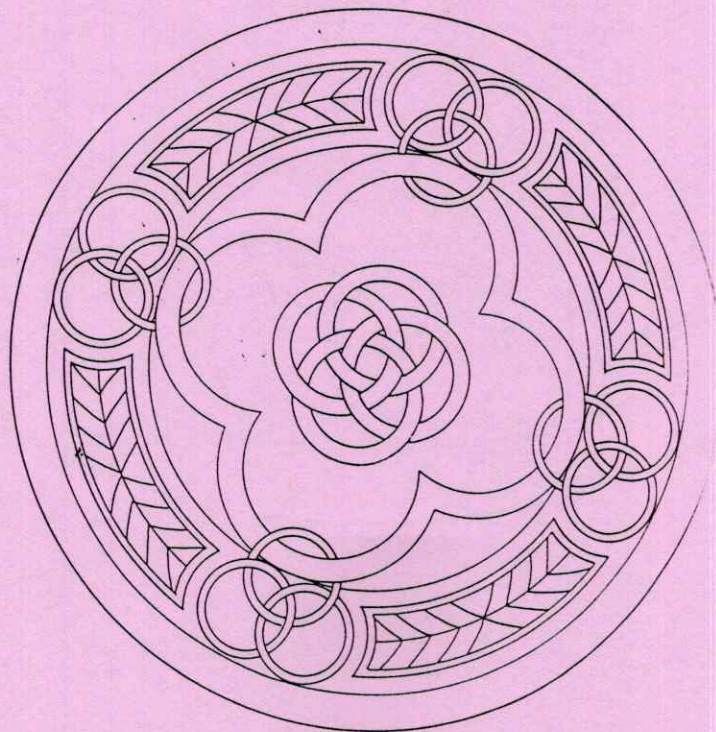
"You cant let them take me. I haven't done anything," his hysteria showing just a little. They started to walk off with him but he pulled back around to face Dorian. "Who are you? What do you have to do with all this?"

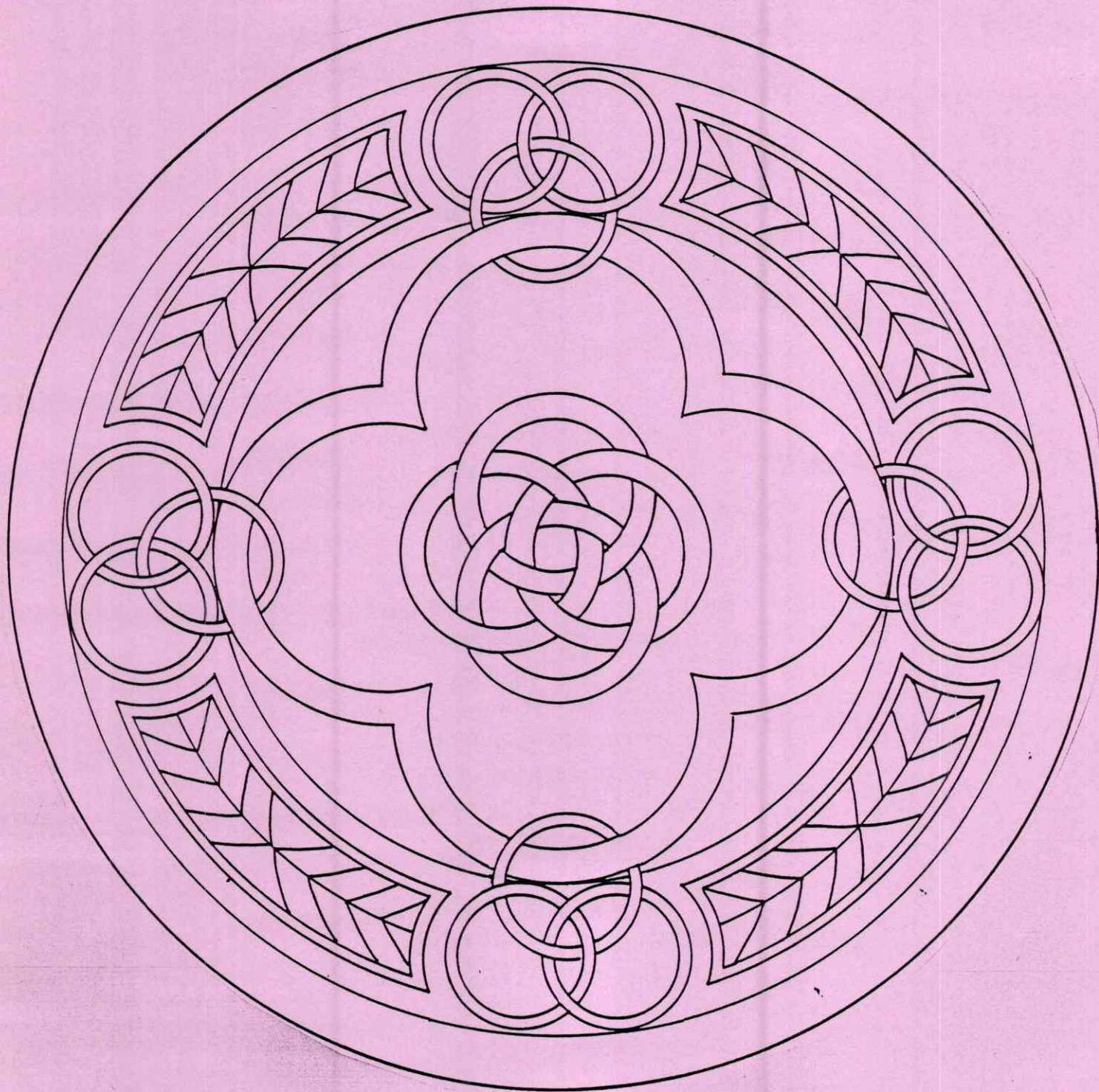
Dorian just smiled a smile that Klaus would have recognized as one of his falsest. "Just think of me as the man who is going to be by Klaus' side for the rest of his life." And with that they took him away.

Cercle du Galloise

by *Corbeau*

Sing to me a song
from your circle of stones.
Sing to me a song
from my past.
Is it magic I ask -
this sound that draws me.
A siren's haunting call -
a prelude to my eternal fall.
'Tis but ash and string -
says she, just a thing
with a soul and 10,000 songs to sing.
One for each year I'm doomed
to live alone.
Never to be content.
Never to be free.
Never again to see thee.





So Ssorry

By Paige Garnett

Sporadic gunfire could be heard coming from the back of the house. Ray Doyle realized with trepidation that none of the shots were from his partner's gun.

"Bodie!" He yelled and felt the icy terror grip his insides. The building area was covered with crumbling obstructions. It took Ray what he felt was a long time to reach the back of the property. The felons were no longer in evidence but all Ray's attention was held by the still figure of his friend. Ray knelt beside Bodie and checked him carefully. There was a pulse and he was still breathing but blood ran down his cheek from a head wound. Ray reached for his R/T.

"4.5 to control, 3.7's hurt. I need an ambulance fast at the back of the house."

"4.5, this is Alpha 1, how bad is he, lad?"

Ray made a second check of Bodie, "Looks like a head wound, sir. His breathing is shallow and his heart beat is erratic."

"Hold on lad, we're on our way."

Ray acknowledged and put his R/T away. He checked the injured man again. His body lay at an uncomfortable angle but Ray was afraid to move him. Instead, he cradled Bodie's head carefully and covered him with his jacket. The blood seemed to be coming from the back of the head. The exact spot was impossible to tell. Before Doyle could fret too long, Cowley and the ambulance arrived. Ray released Bodie into professional hands but he kept an eye on what was being done to his friend.

Cowley noticed his distraction and as the ambulance started up reassured him, "He'll be all right. The doctor thinks he was just grazed. I'll ride with you to hospital and you can give me your report."

Bodie felt the finger of danger reach out to him. He moved quickly away and his world exploded in reds and deep violets. Slowly he became aware of a gray landscape. Maybe it wasn't gray but the fog made it look that way. Dismal it may seem, but he sensed no danger. Curious, he explored this new territory. Oblivious to what was being done to his physical body, his mind wandered in this dream landscape. For that was what it had to be.

He remembered the peaceful lake near the cabin that he borrowed once. Slowly some of the fog cleared and there it was. His flat came to mind and he found himself in it. He laughed and like a child with a new toy, he thought of different places he'd been and found himself there.

Inevitably Ray came to mind and Bodie saw Ray sitting tense and worried in a hospital corridor. Cowley handed him a paper cup of something.

"Drink this, lad."

Bodie was shocked, his dreamscape wasn't all from his memory as he thought. Ray was wearing the clothes he had on that morning, but now they were covered with dried blood.

Ray drank the offered liquid and shook his head. "He's still unconscious. He should've come to by now," Ray remarked worriedly.

Cowley nodded and sounded like he was trying to convince himself said, "He's a strong lad, he'll pull through."

Bodie realized they were both worried really worried and he wondered about his own condition and found himself looking down at his body surrounded by doctors and nurses.

"That's all we can do for now. It's up to him."

The gurney was rolled out of the treatment room. Ray stood up when he spotted his partner.

"Bodie!"

The doctor smiled "We've taken care of his injuries. He should regain consciousness soon."

"He's so pale."

"Blood loss and shock. His color will improve as he regains strength, especially after he wakes up."

Ray nodded numbly, "Can I stay with him?"

The doctor looked over at Cowley, who nodded. "I don't see any problem. Let us get him settled first in recovery."

Ray nodded again.

Bodie's images faded to gray and finally to black.

Ray sat by his partner's bedside. Bodie looked so still it scared Ray. He concentrated on every detail of his friend so he noticed the slight twitch Bodie's body gave. "Bodie can you hear me? Time to wake up, Sleeping Beauty. Bodie?"

Very slowly Bodie's eyes opened.

"That's good, come on Sunshine. Open those beautiful blues."

"Ray?"

"Right here, Bodie," Ray grabbed his partner's wandering hand.

Bodie tried to bring Ray into focus. All he saw was a whitish blur surrounded by reddish fuzz. "Can't see straight."

"S okay, you were hit in the head. Should clear up," Ray pressed the call button. A sister poked her head in and saw the patient awake. She hurried to get the doctor. He arrived mere seconds later, since he had been on his way to check on Bodie.

"Awake I see," he commented.

"I can't," Bodie returned flatly.

The doctor frowned and checked his patient's eyes. "You see the light okay?", he asked as his patient flinched when the light beam shone in his eyes.

Bodie nodded, "I can't focus though, everything's blurred and then fuzzes out all together."

"We detected no damage to the optic nerve. Do you have a headache?"

"A start of one."

"I think the cause is the head injury. You'll probably experience headaches and blurred vision for awhile. We'll keep tabs on it, if it gets worse tell us immediately. Just try to relax. You suffered a severe trauma. Just give yourself time to recover."

"Hear that, sunshine. You get to do what you like best. Just laze around," Ray said trying to comfort his upset friend.

Bodie winced with the increasing head pain.

The doctor turned to leave, "I'll get you something for that headache."

A few minutes later, Bodie closed his eyes after swallowing the medication the sister had presented him with on doctor's orders. Ray thought he had fallen asleep until he felt the pressure increase on his still held hand.

"Bodie?" he called softly.

Blue eyes opened wide.

"What's wrong?"

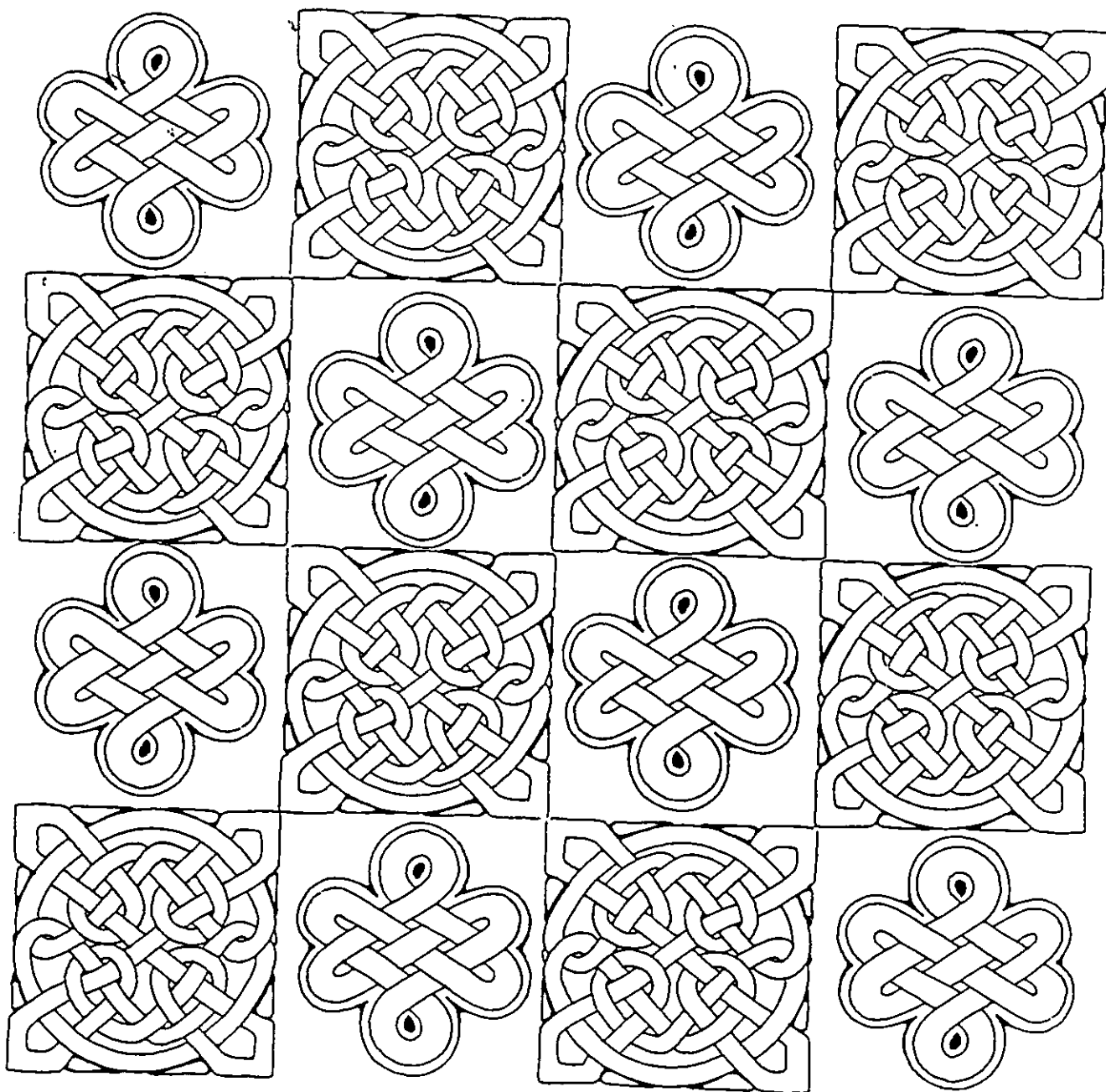
Bodie shook his head, "Nothing. Is any of that yours?" he asked pointing at Ray's bloody clothes.

Ray grinned, "You can see!"

"Don't change the subject, answer the question."

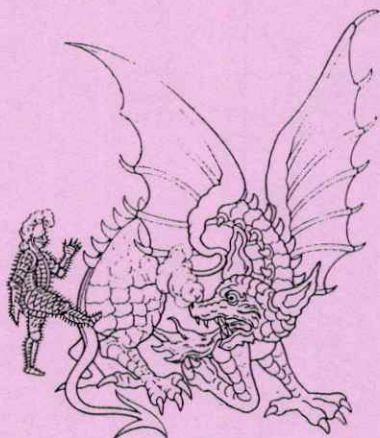
"No, it's all yours, sweetheart. You scared the hell out of me."

"So ssorry," Bodie's voice drifted off as he again fell asleep.

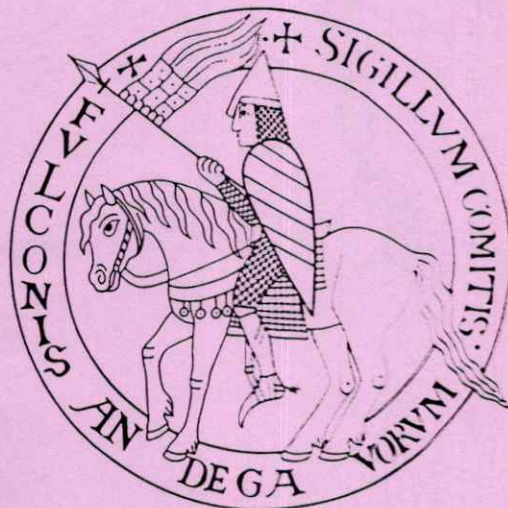
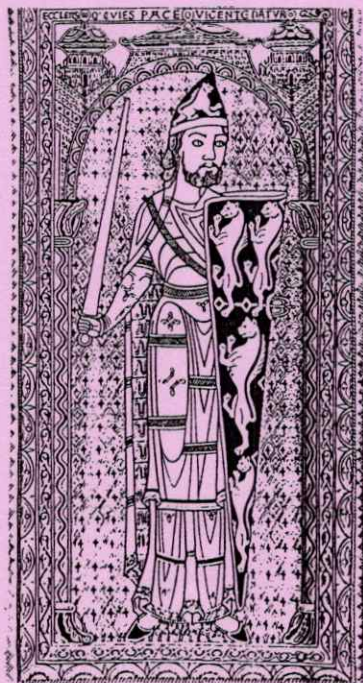


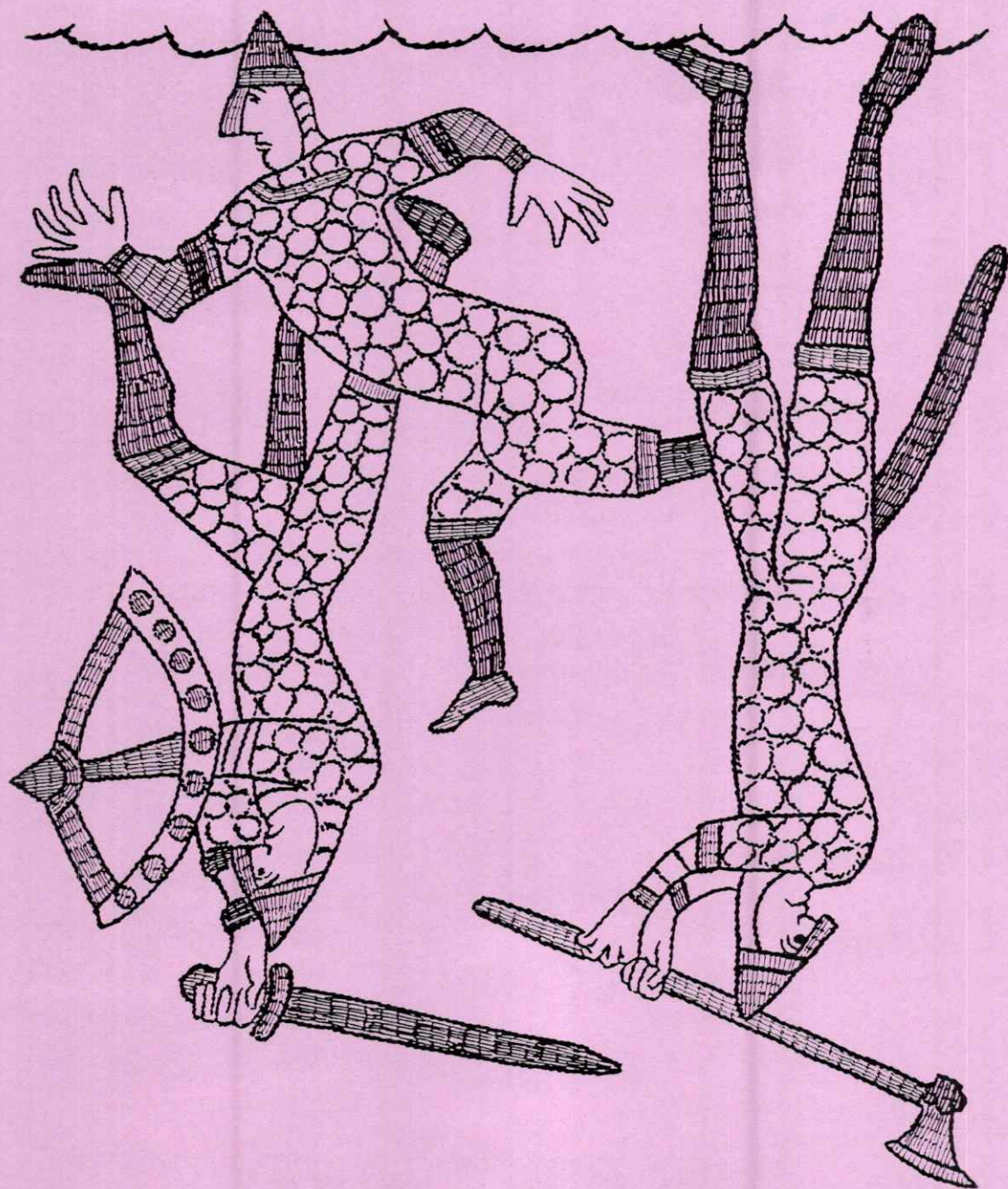
Knight In Blue Satin

by *Corbeau*



Crusader for the Light
now crusader in the dark.
A Knight of the Cross
now doomed to the night
hiding from the cross as
Good and evil - light and dark
searching for an answer - hoping for a way -
for freedom from the night - to embrace the light of day.





In Sprite Of Himself

Part 2

By M

Story so far - After the King Billy affair in 'Wild Justice', Cowley feels that Bodie still has some serious problems. Ray and Murphy agree and are relieved when Cowley only gives him a two-week suspension - 'to get his house in order'. Ray tries to find him at home, but he and his motorbike are already gone to his cottage in Cornwall.

When he first arrives at the cottage, Bodie is plagued by a deep and troubling depression, as well as thoughts of suicide. He walks the beach, and, finding no solace, sobs himself to sleep at the end of each day.

After escaping from a sea cave, he is assisted by a strange woman who seems vaguely familiar to him. The next morning they find that they have a lot in common...he is her long-lost little boy. After all these years he has finally found his childhood memory, and his mother!

Many years before, three brothers had found a ten year old boy in one of the sea caves. They essentially adopted him - giving him their first names and all the companionship time and schooling would permit. His mother reminds him he has a large family; one that will welcome him with open arms. He also rediscovers that is he not truly human, he is that rare and wondrous creature - a sea sprite. Unlike the majority of his people, he can live and work on land or sea, and he is a much valued fertile male.

Cowley sends Ray out to get Bodie, but when he arrives at the cottage, he discovers a trail of Bodie's clothes leading into the water!

Ray is certain that his partner has been overcome by grief and stress. His tirade is interrupted by a woman who has emerged from the water. Ray is oddly calm as this woman approaches him, her naked body touches him. She soothes him, sending her calming influence telepathically at his sense of loss. Suddenly he hears a familiar voice saying: "Ah, hello Ray. See you've already met my mother." Ray is so glad to find that his partner is still alive, he forgives him for the torture to which he's been subjected.

Anea, Bodie's mother, fully intends to return to the family with Bodie in tow. Ray spoils those plans when he explains about his mission to retrieve Bodie for CI5 duty. They part warmly and Bodie promises to visit as soon as possible.

Chapter One

"Cowley wants us to find a bus?"

An unearthly moan, loud and nerve-shattering, came from the tumble of blankets on the cot.

Ray Doyle jerked awake. He almost had his gun in his hand before he realized that it was his very own partner making those disgusting noises across the room. "Eh, mate! You up?"

"That's not the problem," growled the lump under the covers. "Damned alarm didn't go off. We'd better move it." The lump grew and morphed into the semi-naked body of William Andrew Philip Bodie as it threw off the covers.

Ray watched him trudge to the curtain covered area containing the toilet and clawfooted tub. Water slouched noisily.

He levered himself up from his own cot and stretched his arms high above his head. Yawning and blinking sludgy sleep from his eyes, he rose and wandered to the tiny kitchen nestled in the corner of the cottage. 'Hard to believe this little place housed all three of Bodie's godfathers. Easy to see why the local authorities placed Bodie in the orphan's home. Has a certain kind of charm, though.' He fingered the thin but clean dishtowel hanging on the sink.

Wrapped somewhat immodestly in a smallish towel, a dripping wet body emerged from the loo. "Better use up what's left in the fridge," said Bodie as he reached over to pick up his briefs. "May be awhile before the Cow lets me have enough time off to get back here."

Ray opened the door of the mini-fridge, frowning at the coolness that escaped to brush his bare chest. "Not to worry, mate. You've not got enough in here to matter much. We ate most of it last night." He removed milk, a wad of something that smelled to him like cheese, a chip of butter, and some eggs. "Cheese omelets and toast. That'll have to be it." He turned to see Bodie's reaction.

"Fine. Guess I didn't buy very much." The dark head bowed down to tie his trainer. After a bit he added, "Didn't feel much like eating then."

"Well, you sure made up for it last night. You and your mom must have liked that cod. Sure had decent appetites." Ray washed his hands in the basin and began to break eggs into a glass bowl. "How you feeling now?"

"Like eating." The delightfully evil 'Bodie grin' reappeared as he mentioned one of his favorite activities. "However, out of the goodness of my heart, I will volunteer to load the car while you create your masterpiece."

"Terrific," said Doyle with a sarcastic leer. "Almost everything that needs to be loaded is yours. All I've got is the one case. Don't tax yourself, old sod."

As the egg mixture began to sizzle, the green-eyed gourmet flipped the omelet, showing off for the fun of it. Bodie clapped and let out a 'huzzah' for the same reason. The festive mood continued until they were almost through with their food.

Hesitant to bring up the subject, Bodie finally asked "Why'd the Cow really send for me?"

"Needs his best two agents working as a team. 'Told him I..." He stopped when he saw his partner's serious expression. "Truth?" he asked.

"Yep." Bodie's baby blues held him firmly with their sincerity.

He'd find out anyway. Might as well tell him. If Bodie wasn't emotionally well enough to deal with an op, He'd better find it out now instead of when the pressure was on. "Cowley said to be back at noon today. We've got an assignment. Somebody hijacked a bus."

Bodie's eyes widened. He looked at Doyle like he'd just produced triplets. "The Cow wants us to find a bloody bus?"

Doyle took a leisurely bite of toast (plain) and answered knowingly. "Yes, he wants us to find the bus...and the passengers that were on it. The whole squad has been mobilized, along with the Yard and some MI5 twits."

"Any idea who took it?" The eggy blob was disappearing at a much faster rate now as Bodie began to consider possibilities.

"Cowley was working on that when he sent me out here to get you." Ray scraped the last of his omelet off the plate with a scrap of toast. "They hadn't gotten a ransom note when I left."

Putting his empty plate in the dishwasher, Bodie sloshed it clean, then dried it and replaced it on the rough wooden shelf above the sink. Then he did the same for Ray's. For a few seconds he saw in his mind's eye an old man. His Uncle Andy, that was who always used to do the dishes here. He'd always get Bodie to help him and the two of them would discuss the world's (and Bodie's) problems and dreams. 'Funny how he could get me to tell him just about anything. Wonder what he'd think if he knew I was a sprite? Probably tease me and ask for three wishes.'

Ray came out of the 'bathroom' fully dressed and stuffed the last of his dirty clothing into his duffle bag. Hiking it up to his shoulder, he headed for the car. "All set?" he asked over his shoulder.

"Oh, yeah," answered Bodie, leaving his reverie. Draining the soapy water, he rinsed off the metal sink. He dried his hands, took one last longing look around the sunny room, then left and locked the door behind him.

Ten minutes later the motorbike led the Capri into the sleepy village of Bardness. Ray sat ready in the car, tapping his fingers on the steering wheel to the rhythm of the saxophone solo coming from the car's radio. Having arranged to leave his bike for a tune-up, Bodie finally emerged from the garage. "Just let me know what the damages are," said Bodie to the genial owner of the Bardness Boat Sales & Video Rental.

"It's one beautiful machine, Bodie," said Jeff Gillhoulie. The elderly man gently touched the finish of the black Harley-Davidson bike. "William would've loved it".

"I've gotten some expert help with it. A friend reworked the gears last year."

"I'll take good care of it. By the way, I've a few errands in London next week. I'd consider it a favor if you'd let me ride her down to you." Bodie grinned. "Sure, Mr. G. You've got the address. Just ring me up and I'll make arrangements to meet you."

As their hands met in a hearty and familiar handshake, Gillhoulie was still thinking about the eager youngster of twenty years ago who'd spent countless hours in the repair garage with his own sons. He'd grown up to be a fine looking young fellow. Dark good looks, he mused. The three boys had a high old time till Bodie up and ran off. Well, doesn't seem to have hurt him any, though his godfathers were most distressed at the time.

Bodie climbed nimbly into the white Capri, then waved to Gillhoulie. He knew the bike would receive tender loving care, and this way he would be in London more quickly. As they sped toward London and the missing hostage-filled bus, he left the coastal town behind him. But this time he was not leaving the memories of its part in his past.

Chapter Two

"Hey, this is an open relationship, isn't it?"

The bright morning sun had almost burned the fog off the road. Ray wore his sunglasses to cut the glare while Bodie chose to fall into a limp-limbed, sprawling doze.

Stopping once to gas up, they also called the office to check in and get the latest info. Nothing had changed appreciably. Cowley still wanted them at HQ as soon as they arrived.

The traffic on the B3315 increased as they neared London, but they continued to make good time. The weather helped, but the main reason was Doyle's rising excitement and eagerness to be in on the op. Instead of sleeping, Bodie sat up chatting with Ray and making obscene comments about the more obnoxious drivers they were passing.

As they got closer, Bodie began to be a little concerned about his return to the squad. Considering how he'd behaved in Cowley's office, he'd better be on his best behavior. At least for a while...

"Let's hit my place first, mate. I need to get my I.D. and gun."

"No, you don't," The golly's eyes seemed glued to the road.

"Do, too." He looked at Ray to see if he was really paying attention.

"Nope." Ray's face began to crinkle into a small smile.

"Ray, you're losing it. I know I left 'em there before I headed up to the cottage."

"No, you won't need to go home. I've got them in my case." His smile widened, he was one up on Bodie now.

There was silence from the other seat. Then Bodie stared at him, "Worried about me, were you?"

"Me?" Ray mock gasped. "Worry about Mr. Wonderful? You mean I should be concerned when you start pushing the Cow to the point of apoplexy? Ha! Noooooooo, I just went by to swipe your little black book. Just happened to pick up your stuff. Thought I'd feed 'em to the fish since you weren't going to need 'em anymore."

Bodie could tell he was joking, but there was an undertone of anger, or maybe frustration in his voice. "I know this has been hard on you, too. Trust me, Ray. This thing never was about you, or even us - as partners."

"The hell it wasn't." He turned his head, looking hard at Bodie's pained face. "It was about your need to be... whatever it is you are, really."

"A sprite."

"Sprite, yeah. Whatever. You think you're going to be able to do this?"

"Do what? Work? Be your partner and watch your back? Really get into this Sprite thing, be a healer...? Ray, I don't know. I mean, I know my job. You know I'd never let anything happen to you," he said earnestly. Lowering his head to where his chin touched his chest, he added "If the time comes when I can't function as an agent, as your partner, then I don't belong in the squad. Hope you and Cowley would have the sense to see it and pull me out before I got people hurt."

"I don't want that," Ray admitted. "I want you back the way you were. We make a damned good team. You know what they say about us?" He nudged Bodie in the ribs. "That we're like an old married couple."

"Hey, this is an open relationship isn't it? You're not gonna' start demanding stuff like a ring and a house in suburbia, are you?"

"Nope, just trying to figure out how to explain to Cowley that from now on you need a place that has a bleeding swimming pool. When I get my conjugals I'll be able to get all the perks. Could work out well, it could!"

"When pigs fly." Bodie laughed out loud and contemplated an imaginary CI5 flat so equipped. "I'm going to have to make do with the bathtub and nice long showers. And trips to see my family. My new family, that is."

Ray mellowed and said, "Sounds good, Bodie. I hope you end up liking them."

Me, too. It's going to be hard to explain all this to my father, but I really want to see him again. Wonder how much he really understands about the land based world?"

"From what your mom says, your people are pretty knowledgeable about the everyday lives of us mere mortals."

"We're mortal, too, remember? That hasn't changed. But I can see why it's been kept very secret that we exist. Can't think any of us would enjoy being a guinea pig for the greater glory of England, or any other group."

"Okay, sunshine, just what are you going to tell Cowley?" Ray asked as he negotiated a tight turn.

"Not going to tell him anything."

"What about when we have our next physicals? How you going to explain our, thanks to your Mom, now scarless bodies. He'll think we're Russian spies."

"Oh, right. Ah, do you think he'd believe it if I told the truth?"

"Well, there is a first time for everything."

Bodie looked over at his partner. Doyle was concentrating on his driving, too ardently. Bodie knew the golly was waiting for him to react to the double meaning.

Ray finally could no longer stand the silence between them. "You never answered my question. What're you telling Cowley?"

"Nothing, till I need to. Look, I'm still having enough trouble dealing with this myself.

"I guess you still have a lot to learn about being a Sprite.

"Major understatement," Bodie said fervently.

"You know, your mother really made me feel better. Got so relaxed I found myself sort of telling her everything about us, your job, Cowley. What an interrogator she'd make, Cowley would be thrilled."

"Told you she's a siren. She can project emotions. It's sort of hard to explain. Once when I was little, my sister Marne had thrown a rock at me and I got a cut on my head. It was bleeding, so mama picked me up and just held me. First time I ever remember her using it on me. I just felt all... warm, protected. No pain, no anger left. That's kind of what she did for you - down on the beach. When you thought I was dead, she could feel you hurting. From what she tells me, when she touches a person she gets this...energy signature..."

"She gets a 'what'?" asked Ray.

Bodie rolled his eyes, then he laughed. "You know, she said the same thing. It's hard to describe some of the stuff down there, but I need to do it - to explain it to myself. There just aren't exactly the right words to translate what goes on with those...I guess you'd call 'em 'powers'. You've felt it first-hand. How'd you describe it?"

Ray thought for a moment. Then he mused, "Funny, it was warm. Really warm. She put her arms around me, then she hugged me and started making a sound that...well. it vibrated. More than a hum. It felt like she was...crooning to me."

"I'll have to tell her she's being compared to Der Bingle. She'll be thrilled, once she figures out who he is."

"Berk," he countered. "I'm serious. She was really putting out the energy, 'emoting' if you will."

"She'll love that. You think she was just 'acting up', eh?"

"Arrrrgghhh!" was the response. "How'd a nice lady like your mom get stuck with a twit like you?" Ray shook his head and continued. "That 'power' business. The healing and stuff." He took a deep breath, then said "I've gotta' be honest with you, mate. It's a little hard to understand."

"That's what I keep trying to explain. If you think you have trouble dealing with this, think how I feel. You've had a first hand, up-close-and-personal experience with it; and at least you believe it. (Even if you can't describe it.)"

I just barely remember that stuff going on when I was a kid. It didn't seem to be a big deal, because everybody could do it - or almost everybody. Talk about natural... Now, watching mom do it... well, it's eerie."

"News flash, you can emote too."

"You're full of it."

"No, really. When you were in the office arguing with Cowley, all three of us felt the anger you were projecting. Made my skin crawl. I bet you've been subconsciously using your powers all your life."

"Oh, come off it."

"No, think. You're our best interrogator. Last year when that woman tried to kill herself, you were the one who talked her out of it. She said it was you made her feel safe. Now that I think of it, there are a lot of instances where your sprite power has seeped through." Bodie closed his eyes, trying so think. He examined those past events in light of his new knowledge. "Magic has a price," he said softly.

"What's that?" Ray had barely heard him.

"My mother's words, from a long time ago. 'Magic has a price.' You know, I hadn't thought about it; but every time I used to leave an interrogation, I'd feel like shit. I'd get myself home, take a shower..."

"And be ready to party all night," Ray finished for him. "We'd drag ourselves home from an op, you'd pop in the shower or take a bath and come out cheerful and raring to go. I wanted to strangle you sometimes."

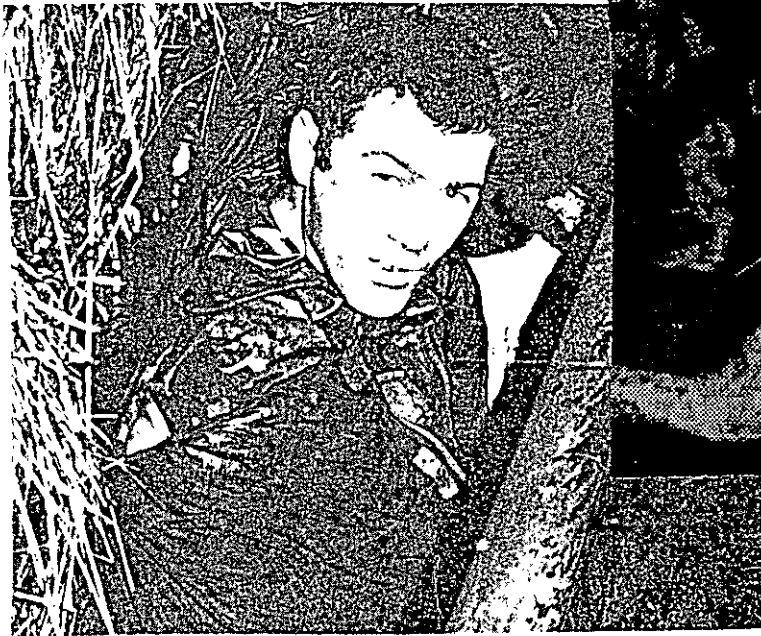
"Water is like a restorative for us. Mother said that after you use your powers, being around water will help; but being in it will tend to give energy and act as an anti-depressant. All of us have the powers to some extent, but the water-dependents are the strongest."

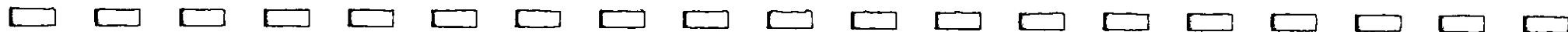
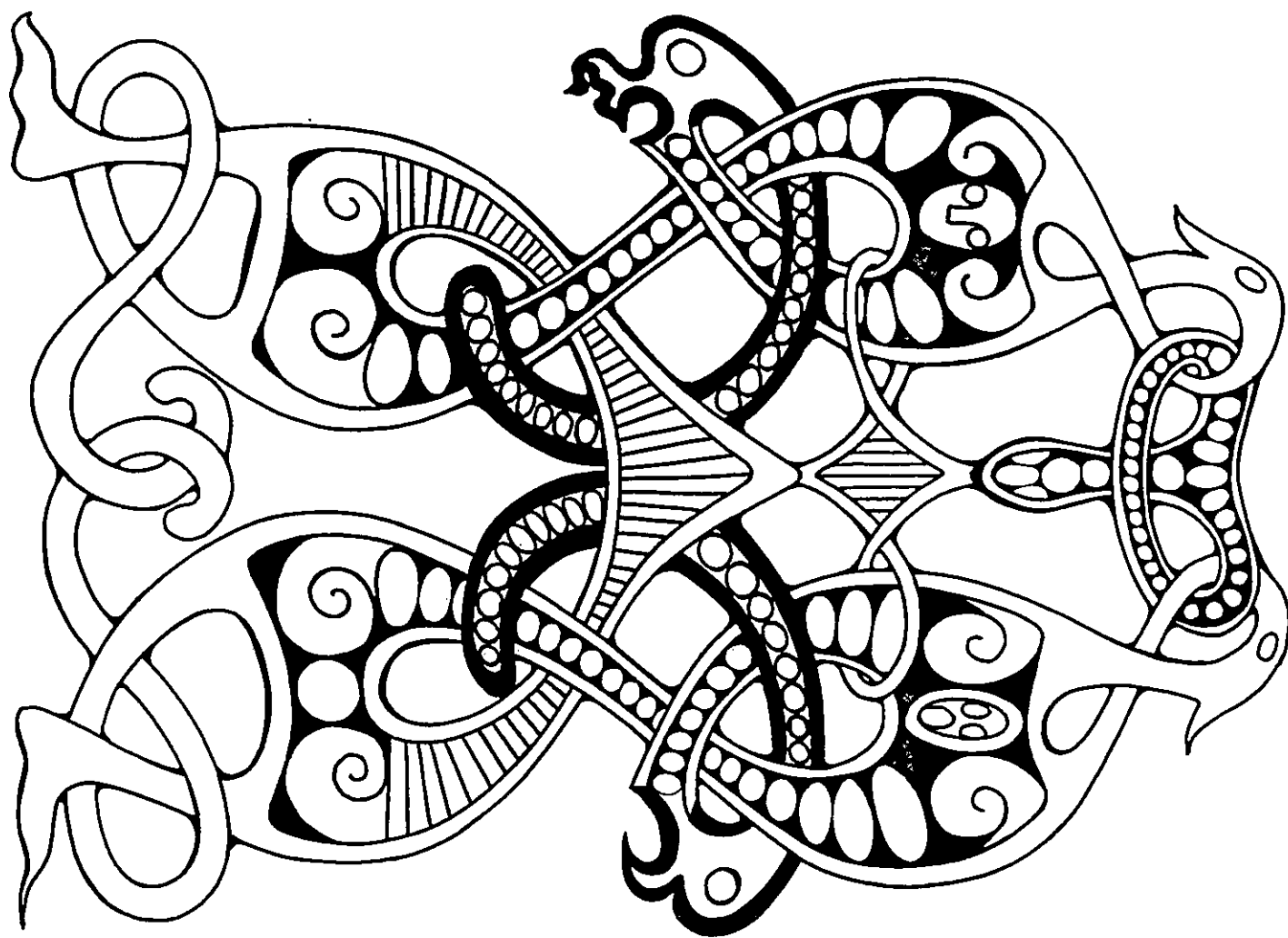
Ray had been quietly thinking back to other things that made his partner 'special'. "Then there's your healing ability to consider."

"I'm no healer," Bodie denied.

"No, mate, 'fraid you are." Ray eyed him and flashed a wicked smile. "Remember that hand wound. The one you really wracked up again during that Meyer terrorist thing in the church? The doc told you it was gonna' be three months before you could fire a gun again. It was a friggin' six weeks. Should I go on? How else have you recovered so quickly?"

"I always was a fast healer," he admitted. And I guess I've always been a Sprite, haven't I? Even though I didn't know it."





"Right, but I never was; and look how fast I've healed from every injury since we've been teamed. Including one that I should've died from in the first place."

Bodie grimaced, remembering the time he'd broken into Ray's flat and found him lying on the floor, bleeding from a near fatal gunshot wound. "Maybe you're right, mate. I'll ask my mother next time I see her."

Ray studiously kept his eyes on the road while he tossed out "So, now I've got a bloody 'Power Ranger' for a partner?" Bodie thumped him on the arm, causing the car to sway a little.

"You're hopeless. Can't appreciate the more esoteric things in life. You're just jealous 'cause your mom can't twiddle with nature. Y'know, it's weird. My mom...she likes you. Lord only knows why. Says she trusts you." His eyes strayed to the rolling green meadow beside the road. No need to build Ray's ego if he could avoid it.

"Knew right away your mum was a delightfully perceptive, to say nothing of gorgeous - lady."

"Just wait till she gets to know you. I seem to remember she had some strict standards."

"I'll bet she did. Well, at least I don't have to worry about a dress code."

That did it. Bodie let out a deep belly laugh that made his stomach hurt. This really was a trip. His own personal modesty remained strong, even though he had spent the last two days cavorting around nude in the water with his mother. He couldn't yet reconcile the two modes. How would he feel when he was with his whole family instead of just his mum? He squirmed in his seat at the thought.

"Better check in again." Doyle said as he indicated the RT on the seat beside them.

Bodie picked it up and flipped the appropriate switch. "3.7 and 4.5 to HQ."

There was the usual static chattering, then a feminine voice replied, "3.7 and 4.5, acknowledged. You're expected in room 7 as soon as you get in."

Without missing a beat, Bodie answered, "3.7, 4.5 message received." He turned the unit to receive and looked at Doyle. "What's room 7? Cowley redecorated while I was gone?"

"New code for land line. Guess the villains are monitoring even the scrambled channels."

"Makes sense to me. Let's find a phone. And maybe a bake shop."

"That's what I like about you, mate. Your consistency."

Ray pulled the Capri into a glitzy four pumper station. While Bodie cruised the area clearly marked 'FOOD', the other half of the team found a phone and dialed one of the three numbers that would give him immediate access to the dispatch desk.

"Celtic Imprints, how may I direct your call?" said the smooth cultured voice.

"Betty, s'me. Ray Doyle. What's going on?"

She sounded much warmer as she answered him. "Ray, where are you? Cowley wants you yesterday."

"About 20 minutes away. Bodie's with me. What's the old man want?"

She clucked daintily at his slur on the boss. "Get in here as fast as you can. We're expecting some equipment and you can get it out to the mobile HQ van."

"All right, luv. On our way. Soon as I pull Bodie away from the sweets counter."

Chapter 3

"Where in the devil are those microphones?" Cowley demanded into the phone. His scowl let the other agents in the van know how unhappy he was with the reply. "Well, get them over here, even if you have to do it by gondola."

The CI5 Controller didn't slam down the phone, but then he rarely let his temper get the better of him. "They're coming, but it'll be about an hour before we can set them up."

"It would sure be nice if we had our own," said Brian Murphy as he adjusted the headset that was threatening to become part of his head.

"Aye, that it would, lad. At least the Yard agreed to lend them to us with no restrictions." Rubbing his sandy colored hair with one hand, Cowley felt (or imagined) grit under his fingers. He needed a shower. He could use a change of clothes. What he wanted was a real drink, not the soda pop or water currently available in the mobile office.

"Call for you, sir." As Murphy handed over the phone he whispered, "It's the PM's office."

George Cowley was not a coward, but neither was he thrilled by this - the fourth call in as many hours, when all they wanted was information he couldn't provide.

"Hello. Cowley here."

Murphy could only hear the Scot's formal answers, but they told a familiar story. The political interlopers who made their jobs more difficult were at it again.

"No, the kidnappers don't know we've located them, and I don't want some overeager reporter to let it out." There was a short pause, then "Thank you, ma'am, I do appreciate your assistance in this matter." He hung up, only to catch his agent's smile of understanding as he took back the phone.

Quietly, so only Murphy could hear, he said, "She understands. That's a help, but she's under pressure as well. Guess it's a blessing in disguise that they've holed up here instead of a more populated area."

For a time they resumed their tasks. Murphy monitored the agents placed around the abandoned warehouse. Jax helped a new agent, Geoffrey, to work out the placement of the ultra-sensitive microphones which would snoop on the kidnappers. Cowley sat wearily down in one of the spare wooden chairs and tried to catch a short nap. When this thing broke, they would get no second chance. They must be at their best. Within minutes he was in that light sleep known to mothers of ailing children and those whose lives depend on waking alert and ready for action.

With remarkable and uncustomary restraint, Doyle's car slowly pulled up beside the CI5 trailer. He and Bodie gathered up the boxes of electronic hardware and carried them inside to their fellow agents.

Cowley rose instantly, with no sign of his recent sleep. "It's about time. Where in the devil have you been, Doyle?"

For a moment, Ray thought to himself 'How typical. We come in together, we've been together for two days, and who does he blame? Me! Ah, how I love this job.'

"Ooooooh, look at this baby." Jax was happily fondling one of the specialized mikes while Geoffrey took the rest of them out of their packing. Letting the foamy protectors fall to the floor in his haste, the new agent began connecting the cables that would carry the sound from the source to the recorders. Then he too examined one of the new devices to see how it could be attached and directed.

Murphy spoke up, "All quiet, sir. We can begin placement now." Cowley nodded and smiled for the first time in two days.

Jax and Geoffrey immediately gathered all of the mikes and their cables, then headed for the door and the emplacement sites.

Cowley motioned to 3.7 and 4.5 to join him as he went to the table still littered with foam padding. Pulling up a chair for himself at one end, he indicated the other two chairs for them. Sweeping the packing aside, he reached for the map on which Jax had plotted the placement of the mikes.

"At around 2:30 Tuesday, an All Britain tour bus was taken from its normal route. The concierge at the Mont Blanc placed eight of her Japanese guests aboard at 2:05. She greeted the regular driver and remembers that he was in good spirits. The bus failed to appear at its 2:35 destination, The Tower of London. Nobody would have realized the loss except for an American tourist's complaint that it hadn't arrived. By 3:00 the police had an APB out on it, but there was no sighting.

"But you found it." Bodie remarked dryly.

"Aye, that we did, lad." Cowley was smiling again.

They knew that smile. It could be good or bad for their best interests, but he certainly couldn't be coerced into getting to the point until he was ready. The two agents looked at each other, Bodie rolled his eyes ever so slightly which Ray acknowledged faintly with a nod. As they had planned, Cowley saw neither.

"It seems that one of Murphy's informants lost his usual flop and had found a place to sleep in an abandoned warehouse. Rising at the crack of mid-afternoon, he was about to exit the building when he suddenly had to back up. A tourist bus was entering the area. It slowed and then pulled into the warehouse next to his. He waited until he felt safe, then left. If he hadn't heard a scream from inside he wouldn't have reported it.

He thought he'd discovered a crime."

"Well, he did, didn't he?" asked Bodie as guilelessly as ever,

"That he did. And he'll get a suitable reward. As it was, Murphy was in my office when the call came in." Cowley looked behind him to check the agent whose back was to them. The Irishman was still attached to his headphones and paying them no attention.

"My reward was the look on Brian's face when he realized that he'd found the All Tourist bus. Och! Thought the man had won the pools." Cowley's eyes crinkled when he laughed. It was good to hear.

"Now, back to business." The Controller's fingers found his glasses and slipped them on. The map showed the warehouse area in large scale. "This is their hideaway." He pointed to a square marked 'Freres Jacobin Inc.'

"You can see how we've placed the men. They're all out of sight, and now those long-range microphones should give us more information about what is going on inside. The six recorders in here will get signals from the transponders and we've staff coming from the Yard to monitor them. As soon as they get here, you two'll want to do the rounds with Jax. See the site for yourselves."

He gave Bodie a thick sheaf of case notes. "That's everything we know so far. Entrances, building blueprints, surrounding terrain et al. I've a meeting with the other officials, coordinating staff." His disgust with this paper-pushing part of the job was evident to them.

Pushing away from the table, Cowley walked over to Murphy. "I'm going now. Keep in touch." As he left the trailer they could see the slight limp that had reappeared with the past 48 hours of strain. There would be more.



Chapter 4

"How does it look?" Ray asked as he rubbed his hand across his freshly-shaven chin.

Bodie glanced up. He was jealous of Doyle's ten minute rendezvous with water. He was determined to be next, regardless of circumstances. The map he held showed the new and improved placements of the other squad members around the 'Freres Jacobin'. He handed the large paper to Doyle, then he headed for the micro basin for a much needed washing up.

Doyle approved of the changes. He was sure the Cow would be pleased with their work of the past 12 hours. It also showed both the new super microphones and the roof stress levels in case they found they could use a helicopter. Sadly, only two buildings could support one, and the 'Freres Jacobin' wasn't one of them. There would be no daring rescue by A Squad as they dropped onto the roof and swarmed down into the warehouse. The best they could do would be to use it for tracking if the kidnappers attempted to run. It was ready in any case.

Bodie was just drying his face when the phone rang. "The old man's on the way," reported Jax to the other eight men. "He has a copy of the ransom note with him. They've threatened to start killing a passenger every hour until their demands are met."

"Any leads on their identity? Affiliation?" Doyle was hoping for miracles, he knew. These types only rarely actually admitted their causes any more. Made them too vulnerable in court.

"No, not yet." Jax sounded disappointed too.

One of the recorder techs, a large framed man with wavy brown hair, sharply turned around toward them. "Gunshot! One only! Shouting... he's telling them to stay put or they'll be next."

"Shit!" Bodie ran to the man's headset, bent down and listened to the man who was yelling at the victims. Doyle did the same; their eyes met as the situation turned into one they knew only too well. Power used on the innocent. That's why they invented the A Squad. Cowley's boys. Could they fix this one? That was a question Doyle always asked himself, but knew better than to give an answer.

George Cowley was not a timid man. He was, however, a very cautious one especially when it came to the lives of his agents. When he arrived at the van, he had already been informed about the first murder.

"It's time to start planning our attack." were his first words. No surprise, really. Now the vendetta had been declared and the kidnappers wouldn't escape if he had anything to do with it. "Options, gentlemen?"

This was Bodie's forte. His military training gave him the necessary expertise to inflict mayhem on those who deserved it, and his brain provided the wisdom to protect the others. Now he had people to save. He prayed silently that the good guys would win.

"We know from the voice signatures that there are at least four men holding the passengers. There has to be at least one other member. He furnished the ransom note and may visit this site. There has been no movement in or out of the building. The ransom demand is for release of three Muslim fundamentalists who set off a bomb in a local hospital. They are incarcerated nearby if it becomes necessary to use them as bait."

"These men have access to our CI5 RT codes. There must be no RT communication, and the police are using the same caution. This entire operation is land line or the special cellular phones all agents have been issued. These phones come equipped with a scramble feature. We don't want these men to know we know about their eavesdropping. Someone in that group is a bloody electronic genius."

"Warehouses have the advantage of space and visibility for the terrorists. This one is three stories high, with strong but elderly construction. The first floor is or was, virtually empty. Fire inspection reports some stored boxes in the second floor, and nothing on the third. But the windows provide them an excellent view in all directions. There are four entrances to this unit. The three on the west are commercial size garage doors, each operated on a separate hydraulic winch. The fourth door is on the north side and seems to be defended by at least one person at all times. They may have parked the bus in front of it to seal that entry. The roof entrance is small, only room for one at a time, and getting through with a vest on would be difficult. (And the men listening knew that without one they'd be goners.) Passage below is by ladder, reportedly unstable, and a drop of about forty meters to the floor. It is reasonable to assume that the roof entry is mined. The hostages are grouped at the south end of the building, as far from the parked bus as possible."

There is no longer an entry on the east side. It was bricked up some time ago against theft.

"Fourth, two weeks ago a large shipment of explosives was stolen from a distributor in Westhaven. Their security lock system was very sophisticated. If this group was responsible for that theft, they have enough explosive to blow this part of London off the map. If their demands aren't met, they may be ready to blow up both hostages and rescuers."

— "Additional information: The building is porous enough to permit some sound to penetrate; they're going to hear us coming a mile away unless we're very careful."

"In conclusion, we will be going in, and soon. At this time, plans are being made to get army ordinance assistance for destroying the entryway quickly. Armor-piercing rounds will be used to distract and dismantle the middle entrance at garage level. Standard tear gas and stun guns are being recommended as well as usual weaponry. As soon as the plans are in place, you will be notified."

There were only a few questions, mostly about the unprecedented decoding of the police and RT system's scramble setting. Then the agents left to return to their duties.

Ray Doyle sat crumpled into a sleeping position, but his eyes were still open. Staring at his partner, he noticed a growing excitement, a slight nervous energy in place. "You're glowing, sunshine. I think you've got something. In fact, I'm damned certain you've got something. What is it?"

The blue eyes flashed in response. I think I know how to do it. The only gap I can find is in the sewer system. But I know I can get through that. The system maps are only about two years old and they show a clear passage."

"And do what, pray tell? Those places all have anti-theft bars welded on 'em. Even if you got through, you couldn't get to the victims. And if you tried to blow the bars off the opening, they'd find you. I don't think so."

"Spoilsport." He frowned and took another sip of his chocolate milkshake. Naturally he began to consider alternate attack modes if he couldn't get through the bars. Doyle had just closed his eyes when Bodie thumped him, hard.

"I've got it! I've bloody got it."

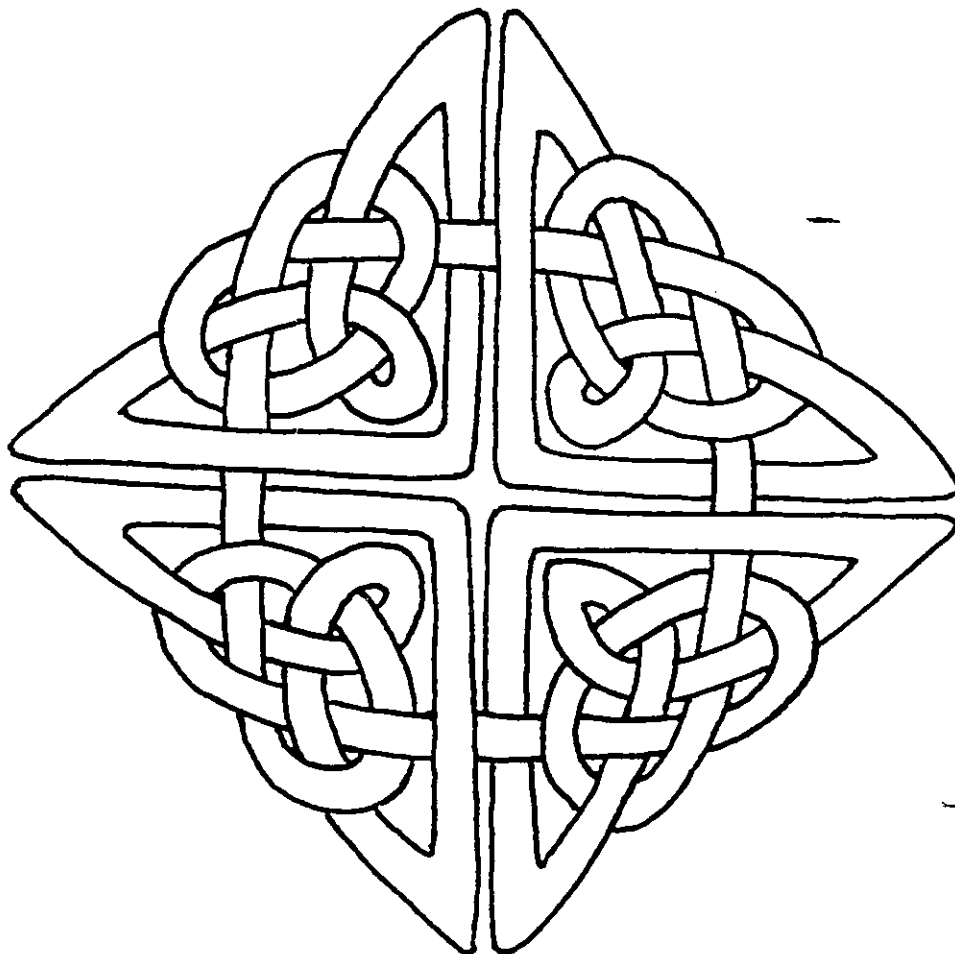
"Well, don't give it to me."

"Listen to me, will you? What if I took gas canisters and set them off, then made a fast exit?"

Sounded too good to be true, to Doyle. He thought about it for a long time. Then said. "This is where the sprite thing comes in, isn't it?"

He at least had the good grace to lower his otherwise unrepentant head. "I know it'll work, Ray. Come on." He dragged Doyle up from the chair and out to the parking surface outside the van. He didn't want to tell his plan to the world - or the agents in the van. "Look, we don't have long. It's only another twenty minutes till they kill another one."

Doyle looked at him, all eager puppy wanting a bone. He gave in. "What do you want me to do?" He had this weird feeling about the op...but he couldn't take the chance that more people might die. Except that it might be Bodie that died. He refused to even consider that. He told himself firmly, 'job first'.



Chapter 5

"Sorry, Bodie. It's an interesting plan, but we just don't have the time, or the spare manpower to let you do it."

William Andrew Phillip Bodie looked at his mentor, the CIS Controller, with disbelief. "But it's the only way, sir. I can get in silently from underwater, and then release the gas into the warehouse. When you attack, everyone inside should be either slowed down or incapacitated."

Cowley's nerves were frayed from dealing with self-important bureaucrats who couldn't make a decision if their lives depended on it. The problem was that people's lives did hang in the balance this time. It wasn't like him to dismiss Bodie's ideas altogether. "I canna' spare you, Bodie," he said angrily. "You're my point man. And I canna' send you out when we might need you at any minute. You're to direct the fire team, have you forgotten?"

"No, sir." Bodie's charm and enthusiasm had worked on Doyle, but Cowley had a legitimate point.

Chastised, the blue-eyed wonder sat back down at his console next to Murphy.

"Better luck next time," said Brian with a wink and a quick smile. Sneaking a glance at his own

phones and blinking lights, he turned back to Bodie and asked, "Could you relly have done it?"

"Yes, honestly. I could have gotten in and gassed them. Can't understand why he won't let me try."

"Time mostly." Brian flashed his killer level smile at half-power. You'd need equipment, scuba, tools for breaking into the pipe... And what if it's one of the old ones. Some of them were too small for even a child to get through, not to mention a full grown man with a tank strapped on his back."

"You've been thinking," admitted Doyle as he joined the two of them. How about us finding out what size they are? Call Betty, if anybody can find out, she can."

"It's the middle of the night!" Murphy was thinking of his own bodily safety if he interrupted Cowley's wonder-girl secretary unnecessarily. He valued his nether regions and preferred them to remain intact. Which they would not be if Betty considered this a stupid question. (stupid questions were those one could jolly well look up themselves.) He decided to risk it.

"Trust me," said Mr. Modest. "She'll be happy to help."

"You! Like hell I'll trust you," said Murphy, remembering a couple of Bodie's more interesting scams in the rest room and elsewhere. "But I'll take a chance on the fair maid." and he dialed HQ.

They continued to wait on the SAS team chosen to bring the armament to their location. Calls were made. As time grew shorter, irate calls were made, until at last it was 1AM.

Every agent in the van felt, rather than heard, the shot that was fired in the Freres Jacobin warehouse. Perhaps it was that infinitesimal jerk made by the listener's bodies when they heard it. Maybe in the silence of the thin-walled office they could hear the faint echo of the round.

Almost to a man, they winced. Pain expressed facially because they couldn't act it out any other way at this time. This was business, but not a nice one.

It took a moment before the men could resettle themselves. That fragile inner quiet was shattered again by the ringing of the phone on Murphy's desk. He picked it up. "Hello, How may..." he gestured for Cowley instead of continuing.

The 'old man' held the phone distastefully. He knew what to expect. "Cowley here. What is it?"

As he listened, his eyes began to squint. They darted around the room as if looking for a scapegoat, but that wasn't his way. Finally he took a deep breath and answered, "We're doing everything we can. I'll get back to you when I have more information." The phone was replaced in the cradle with deliberate care.

There was a stillness in the room. They could feel his ire rising and knew this op had become even more personal for him. "They certainly do have an electronic genius in their midst, Bodie." He nodded to him with a slight bob of his head. "Yes," he observed as he walked a few steps toward the rear - away from the offending instrument. "They sent a fax, a death photo if you will, to the PM." He was embarrassed and angry. Just what he warned his men not to become.

"I'm going to #10. Brian, you're in charge. Bodie, get on your bike. We have a one-hour reprieve from the terrorists. Use it, man." While Bodie was still reacting to the permission, Cowley left the van.



Chapter 6

The tanks rubbed his back right above the kidneys. Straightening up to pull the last two straps into place, Bodie glanced over at Murphy. "I'll be back before you know it," he simpered annoyingly.

"And probably with two mermaids," jibed Doyle. Bodie looked at him with a black twinkle in his eye, thinking 'Don't give me away'. The golly just laughed

Just don't forget to keep Geoff and Karen near the back. They need the experience, but I don't want to lose them to enthusiasm. Everybody's going to want a piece of those terrorists and I want them alive. No glory if you don't go to Allah, you know."

"I know," Brian Murphy agreed. He felt the tension grow between them as Bodie got ready to enter the car that would deliver him to the water's edge. "You take care, now. Don't take any chances." Ridiculous, he thought to himself. That's how we live. "When you give me the double signal, I'll notify the others to begin the twenty minute countdown."

Bodie nodded. He looked at Murphy's anxious face, then grabbed him and hugged him hard. He'd like to have divested them both of the quivering nerves that threatened perfect performance. They couldn't afford any errors this time.

It lasted only for a few seconds, but Murphy would carry that assurance like a talisman as he released the other agent and quickly turned to re-enter the van.

Doyle watched the affirmation process with no jealousy. Murphy had been closer to Bodie than most of the agents. If he needed a blessing of sorts before saying goodbye, that was OK with him. He opened the door for his partner, bowing low and pretending to sweep off an imaginary chauffeur's cap. Bodie giggled and clomped with his frog feet into the passenger seat.

Their own parting was more formal. Doyle just looked at him, handing over the tools and bags one by one as Bodie personally put them into his small mesh net bag. Check and double check. Doing it by the numbers served to give them something to do as well as bolstering their courage. Together they lowered the bulging bag into the dark river water. No noise now.

"That's it", said Mr. Modest. "If I make it in less than an hour, you're buying!" With that, he took the rope Doyle still held and gave it a small jerk. When Ray answered the pull with a strong grip, Bodie offered a mock salute and began to rappel down the rope to the slick black water.

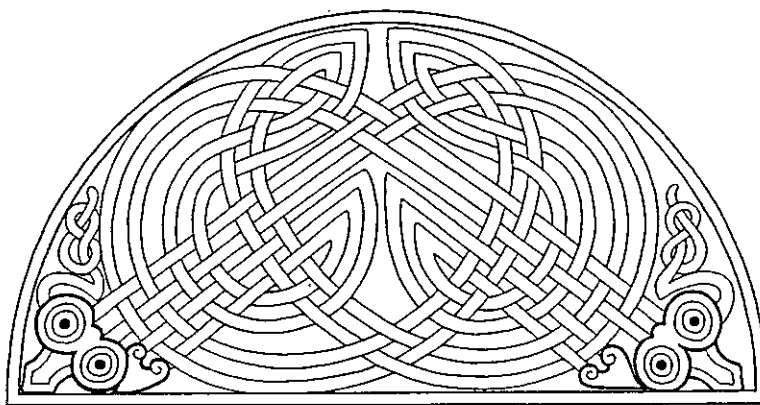
It would have been a short swim, even for a human, if not for the heavy mesh bag he had fastened to his back. Once underwater he stopped the oxygen flow from the tanks and discarded the face mask. Sometimes it flopped against his body as he changed directions or took a strong stroke.

The drawings of the sewer system were mostly accurate. By examining their exit pipes he was able to trace his way from one building to another with relatively little difficulty. Eyes that were used to clean tap water, or even chlorinated pool stuff had more trouble with this slimy river water.

Every pipe he had seen so far had the standard grating attached, supposedly to prevent pollution, but more often to keep the owner honest about what he sent down the sewer into the river. As he approached the Jacobin building, he slowed his pace, consciously breathing slowly and evenly as his lungs adapted. His fingers reached out and touched the nuts that held the grating on the end of the pipe. The wrench he'd included was adjustable, but it needed only a nudge to grasp the nut tightly and twist it to the left. A slight vibration was produced when the next was turned. 'Would that tiny aberration cause him to be discovered? How sophisticated were these bastards anyway?'

Every now and then Bodie realized why the 'old man' was the 'old man'. The last of six nuts had been removed. This should have been the easy part, he thought. Unfortunately, he now knew at least one reason why Cowley had been right about having two men on this task. The damned grate was so heavy, he wasn't wure he could pull it off the bolts. And if he got it off the bolts, what would he do with it? If it hit the bottom, the sound might be loud enough to be picked up by sensitive equipment. And thus announce his arrival. If he stayed with it to soften its landing, he might be trapped by its weight. Just before pitching caution to the wind - or water, as the case might be, he remembered the rope.

Mentally patting himself on the back for his cleverness, he looped the rope several times around some of the cast iron rungs. Then he tied it firmly to the struts that held the sewer pipe at the correct angle and kept it from coming loose to attack innocent boats. Pulling with all his strength, he managed to bruise most of his knuckles, almost slice a forefinger, and successfully remove the grating. He watched uneasily as it swung slowly off of the bolts and down into the murky depths. Then there was another vibration. The thing had come to a stop, a first stop in its journey toward the bottom. It jerked again forcefully on the rope and Bodie's eyes showed more white than usual until the pressure seemed to even out.



Chapter 7

"You can't go that way," Doyle told Major Darling diplomatically. He had already explained that the terrorists could see them if they used that route to the building where they would be setting up their gun.

"That's the only way to get my men into the building," he replied in icy tones. "So, that's the way we're going."

Green eyes flashed warning signals to those who knew Doyle. Under other circumstances bets would be taken on the length of time the major would remain intact. But it was just as if he could hear Bodie's voice telling him 'keep it simple, don't confuse them with the facts.' Instead of sharing with the major an assessment of his team's efficiency, intelligence and possible lineage, Doyle said gently, "Sir, I would like to propose a more efficient way of accessing the roof. Safer and shorter." It was neither, but it would take the officer a while to figure that out. 'Lay it on thick and just keep spreading,' he reminded himself. He just hoped that these guys were better shots than they were navigators.

Murphy watched his fellow agent lead the army types out of the van. He shook his head. Doyle would get them to the right site, but he would be hard pressed all the way not to share his feelings about their ineptitude. He wondered where the shit would land after this op was over.

His phone rang shrilly, interrupting his imaginary scenario of Doyle assisting the major with flying lessons out of a second floor window. The best part had been the other soldiers clapping and hoisting Ray on their shoulders.

Her voice was breathless. "Murphy, the pipe's too small. He can get in the first part, about twenty feet. Then it changes to a smaller diameter. There's no way he can get up it with a tank on. And the small pipe runs about forty feet before it gets to the building." She stopped, there was nothing else to say. They couldn't warn him. He had no communication device except the little signal unit, and that was one-way only.

Murphy was glad she didn't ask the question. He didn't want to think about it either. Bodie was a hard head. It was his plan and he'd be devil-be-damned to make it successful. Would he shed the tanks and try to make it anyway? He shuddered. Time would tell. At the moment he had no leeway to consider Bodie's fate. All hell was breaking loose.

Chapter 8

Dealing with politicians always left George Cowley with a strong need for a shower. He left his driver to get petrol from their own garage pump. He'd be damned if they'd pay street rates if there was a perfectly good alternative.

He climbed up the stairs to his office. Lord, they seemed to get longer and higher every year. Betty was not at her station. Everyone who could be mustered was at the warehouse, so the office felt empty. Just as well, he thought, as he turned to his own office. The light was on, but the door was closed. He stopped, listened for a moment, then moved closer.

"You double dratted little bastard," said an angry female voice. "You'd better have more damned sense than to do it."

Without a pause, Cowley drew his gun and moved closer to the door. It sounded like Betty. 'Could the terrorists have infiltrated here?'

'Surely not,' he decided. 'Then who could it be? One of his men?' The thought of that kind of betrayal brought him up short. No, he couldn't imagine any of his men who would be stupid enough to force their attentions on Betty. She'd take care of them in her own inimitable fashion, and they'd wish they'd never been born.

Those two seconds of imagined revenge relieved his mind a little. But she would never bring a stranger to this office. It just could not happen. But George was above all a pragmatist. The woman deserved a life outside of her duties to CI5. Lord knows there was little enough time in which to enjoy it, she worked the same or more hours that he did. He didn't like the fact that he might have to dismiss her for a breach like this.

"And you'd better not blame it on me, either. You're the one who didn't wait for the data. No, you just plunged ahead like the twit you are and..."

Whoever it was, they were taking this tongue-lashing with good grace. This had to be an incredibly vital situation for Betty to risk having an outsider here. With great surprise, he realized that she might just be talking about being pregnant! He worried that thought for a bit, not sure if he was happy for her or concerned about the loss of a good agent. Then his better judgement intervened. She had to be talking about him!

"Someday you're going to realize you just can't treat people like servants. You throw your weight around and make..."

George risked opening the door. Later he realized that the better part of valor would probably have been to knock or make some noise. He was only a little surprised to find his loyal secretary and right hand man (for he considered her that) sitting at his desk talking to herself.

She didn't startle easily. He'd always admired that about her. And her demeanor toward him was perfectly professional. One would never dream that she'd just been in the middle of chewing him out for past faults and present behavior.

"Mr. Cowley," she acknowledged sedately. She picked up a sheaf of documents from beside his blotter and stood to hand them to him. He began to worry. Her resignation?

"I hope you don't mind that I borrowed your desk. The tech team assigned to rework our communication system has fouled up all of my lines. This was the only place they didn't destroy."

'Yet', thought the old fox. "You deliberately let them play with your phone lines while protecting mine. Thank you, Betty. I appreciate being able to use them, even if I seem to be living at the mobile site.

"You're most welcome , sir."

He almost expected her to say 'No thanks are necessary for Vulcans, sir'.

"Have the military arrived with their equipment?"

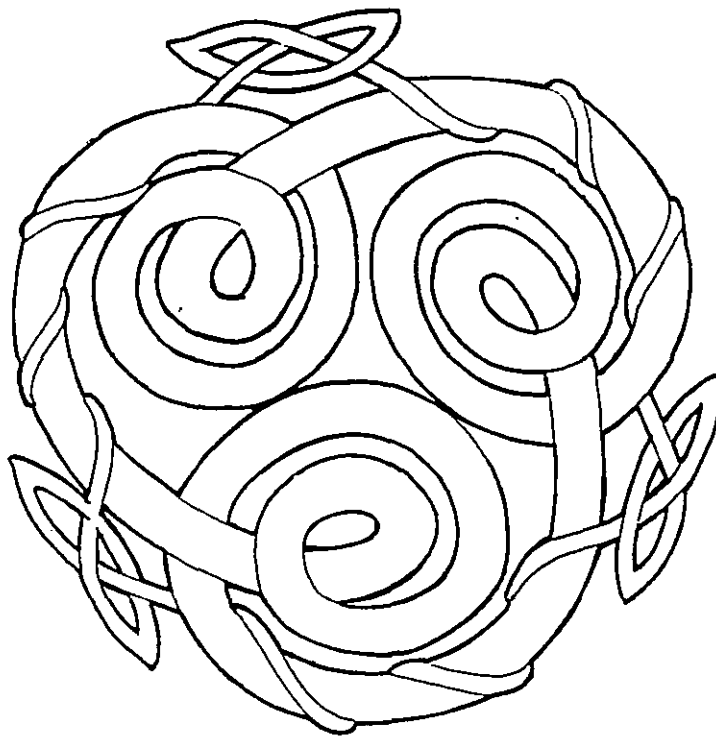
"Yes, just about five minutes ago. Once Ray gets them settled, he'll report in. Murphy has everyone in place."

"And Bodie?" He shook his head in annoyance at his own question. "No, it's too soon for him to be back, but has he signalled?"

That got an unexpected reaction. The unflappable Betty of the granite eyes and 'iron fist in a velvet glove' bit her lip and sighed. "That's a bit of a problem, sir. It seems he misjudged the size of the pipes he would be entering." She came out from behind his desk. He can get partway in, but the last forty or more feet of pipe are too small for anyone with a tank to negotiate."

Again the unspoken question. She saw it in his eyes. He knew she saw it. "Well." He stopped to take a deep breath. "We'd best get ready for the final phase." He glanced at her with concern. She met his gaze, head high. Her eyes were a little too bright, but they were alert and she was ready for action.

He would need her strength now, much more than he realized.



Chapter 9

The dark water parted for him as he smoothly wove his way up the large pipe. This was a cinch. If he didn't have to carry the stupid mesh carrybag he'd be able to go much faster. Spilt milk. He'd need it up the way.

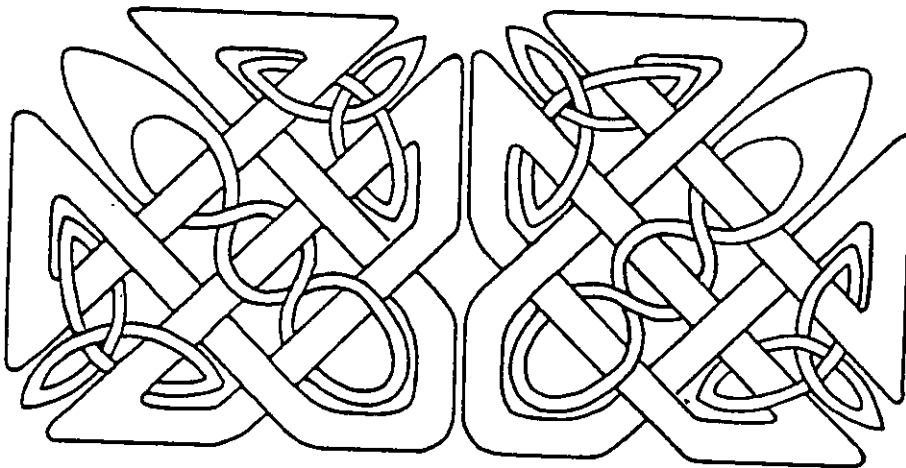
To his surprise, 'up the way' came only a few feet away, as he realized the pipe was narrower ahead of him. With little thought, he simply shed his bulky air tanks and got ready to continue up the pipe with only the carrybag.

'Oops, better fix these tanks so they don't give me away,' he thought. One quick twist of a valve would let a trickle of air escape into a 'NO-LOSS' balloon arrangement that would float the tanks to the surface. The river patrol had already been alerted to his plan and they would probably fish them out. Otherwise the Cow would take them out of his hide. He continued up the pipe with only the carrybag to annoy him.

As he moved forward, his nose began to itch. 'Maybe, I'm not a sprite,' he said to himself: 'Maybe I'm a witch. No, a warlock. Male witches are called warlocks. Sounds like fun... 'Hey, Sam, I'm home!'

The light from the flashlight began to dim, and the path ahead grew hazier. He shook the light, thinking that the batteries must be going dead. 'Sam, zap these for me, will you?' He stopped and began to rub his eyes, digging his fingers into the flesh to ease the irritation.

From somewhere in his past, a familiar notion tried to surface through his poisoned nervous system. He knew that smell! 'Sam, if you love me, tell me what in the hell it is.'



Chapter 10

Cowley let the water sluice down his back. Though his office shower was small, it would do the job. He had only minutes now to finish and get back to the car for the trip to the warehouse. He reluctantly turned off the soothing stream. Dressing quickly, he joined his secretary beside the open case she was stuffing with necessary documentation and obfuscatory paperwork. Only moments now.

On the walnut desk, his phone sat and rang, but the sound was much solid than the one at the van.

The solidity was appropriate. It was the PM. This was a difficult time for her., he knew that. She was facing a crucial vote in two days. She layed it on the line. If he couldn't salvage this operation to her satisfaction (read the party's satisfaction), she would have to ask him to resign.

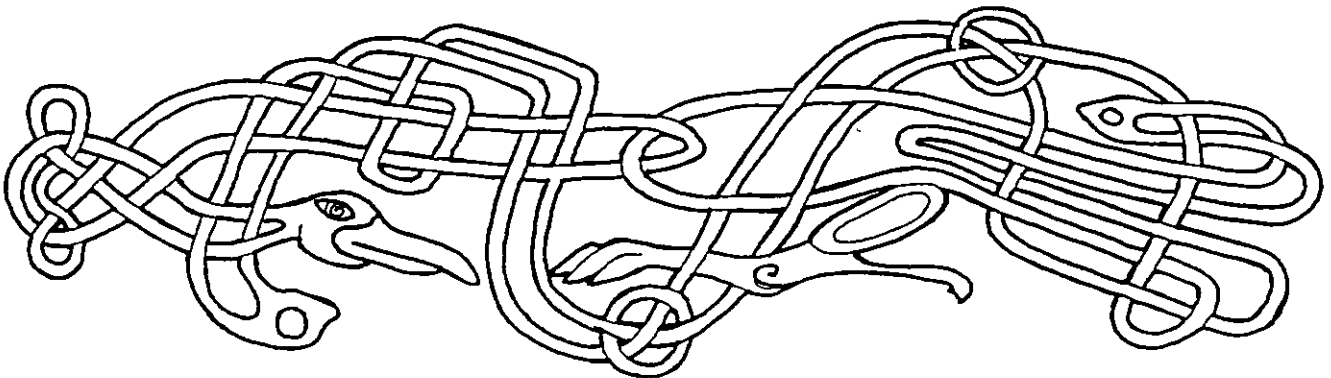
"I see." His heart threatened to leap from his mouth. "Of course, it will be forthcoming if requested."

He noticed the slight jerk of her hand as she finished packing his briefcase. She'd caught the inference. Poor lass, she didn't deserve this. None of them did, they'd worked too hard to see it all eaten by petty bureaucrats.

After he put down the instrument, it took a few seconds before he could say anything. Finally, he took a weary breath and said to Betty. "Say a prayer, lass. For all of us." She nodded and he left the office for what he hoped was a successful rescue, of the hostages, and of CI5.

'Damn you, Bodie. You'd better be all right. Otherwise who am I going to drink with when this whole thing is over? Ach, you and your impetuous nature. You'll never make contoller, lad, if you don't start thinking it all out first. And you'd better make it, because I don't want to turn it over to anyone else.'

He surprised himself. He hadn't realized he even could release the squad. And he wasn't ready yet. Not so much of the 'old', thank you!



Chapter 11

"Holy Shit!, who the hell put this here! His head was hurting so badly he could hardly see. It was plastic explosive he was smelling. The gizmo in front of him had about a pound of it, talk about up for grabs.

What about the trigger? Is it motion- sensitive? If I get it loose, can I get it out? Oh hell, what if it explodes on air contact! Shit!!!!

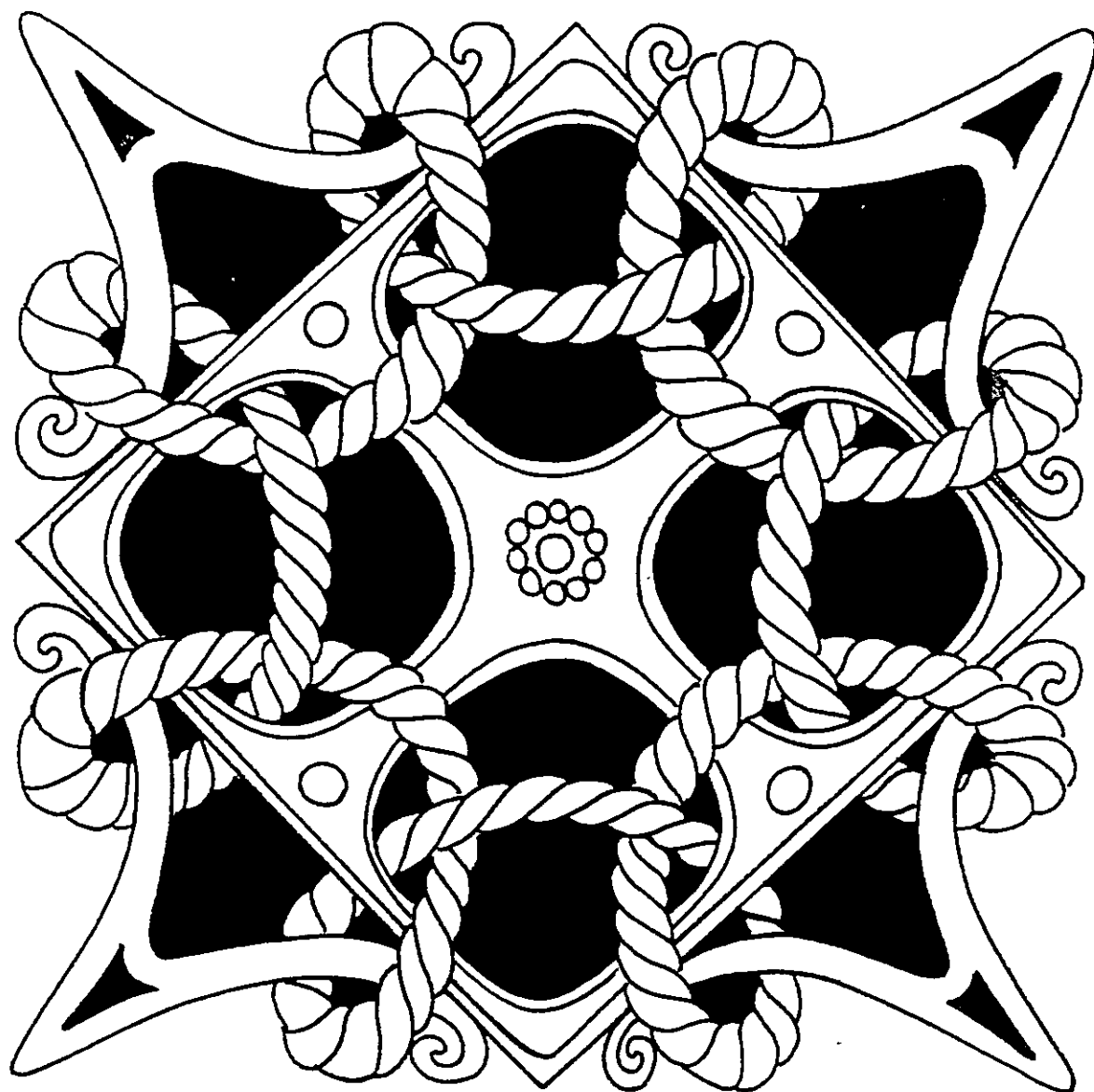
Outside the van, the agents gathered for the final phase. Just as they turned to see Cowley emerging from his official car there was a loud explosion. A very bright light came from the direction of the Jacobin building. Debris and smoke came falling down on them from over the roof. They ran for cover into the van and into cars.

Cowley just stood there. Then he looked at a shocked Doyle and said, "It's over , lad."

"No, that can't be Bodie! yelled the stricken agent. But inside he knew that it well might be.

To Be Continue.....





No Such Thing As A Merman

Part 2

By Paige Garnett

The night before, Ray Doyle had related the story of his rescue by a merman to his niece, Jessica. Now he was trying to read a very exciting spy novel but his mind wouldn't stay on the words. Maybe he should've joined his lover in an afternoon swim, but he hadn't felt like it. The words blurred as his mind drifted back to an underwater cave.

After being beaten and thrown overboard by the nest of criminals I'd tried to infiltrate, I painfully awoke in a room with walls of rock. I was covered by a blanket and lying on a soft bed of seaweed. Before I could explore my surroundings further, I drifted back asleep. In a kind of a haze I remembered someone occasionally seeing to my body's needs. I woke several times only to be soothed by strong gentle hands and a deep soft voice. Each time I awoke, I was a little closer to becoming fully aware. Finally I opened my eyes to the sight of a handsome young man leaning over me fussing with the blanket.

"Don't move, you may hurt yourself again," he said the voice a mixture of anger and concern. "You have to keep warm."

A splash caused me to turn my head toward the water below the rock shelf where I lay and see that my nursemaid sported blue-green scales from his waist down. The rest of his body was still in the water. When I moved away in surprise, he followed after me to set me back carefully on the bedding. He had to lift his body up onto the rock shelf and that's when I saw the scales formed a tail ending with a silver fin.

"Lie still," he first scolded then reassured me. "I won't harm you. You're safe."

After the initial shock of finding myself in the care of a merman wore off, I vaguely remembered strong arms pulling me away from the boat.

"You saved my life, didn't you?"

He nodded and his long dark hair fell into his face. I smiled and held out my hand. He shyly took it - the handshake hesitant. I smiled at him and he smiled back. His dark blue eyes seemed to glow with an inner light.

"My name's Ray. Ray Doyle. Thanks for rescuing me."

"Mine's Dion," he replied as he brushed the long hair back from his face. "And you're welcome."

"Ah, where are we?"

"Underwater cave not too far from where those men threw you into the water. Why did they do that?"

I wasn't sure what a merman would know about criminal activity. "I work for an organization like the police, we enforce the law and they were criminals I was investigating. When they found out who I was, they tried to get rid of me."

Dion nodded in understanding, "We have peacekeepers too, although none of my people would think of killing one."

Any further discussion was interrupted by the appearance of another of Dion's people. This one a beautiful woman who swam over to the edge of the rock shelf and handed Dion an antique glass bottle. She smiled at me as I looked her over carefully. She had long brown hair and Dion's dark blue eyes as well as being about his age. Her white teeth were just slightly pointed and I realized Dion's were as well.

She kissed the merman on his cheek, "So little brother, your surfer is awake."

Dion grinned at her, "This is Ray Doyle." He turned to me, "Ray, this is my sister, Anka."

Anka shook my hand and frowned, "The pain is returning, Dion give him the medication."

Dion poured a portion of the bottle into a shell. "Drink this," he said as he held the shell and helped me sit up so that I could.

After the first sip, I began to feel drowsy but the pain was gone.

"Sleep well, Ray Doyle," Anka said softly before she dove back into the water, her dark blue tail flipped twice before she was gone.

By the time I finished the drink, I was more than half asleep. When I next woke, I felt much better and in need of the loo. Dion pointed to a stoneware pot near the rock wall and after I relieved myself, he was ready to feed me some kind of cold fish broth. It was not very tasty but filling and I only ate about half of it before I felt myself dropping off again. The next time I awoke, I felt even stronger and as I've come to expect Dion was there. The stoneware pot had been emptied and I made use of it again. We talked while I ate the slightly tastier broth. Dion had an insatiable curiosity about the surface and asked endless questions.

"But how do you know as much as you do about my world and do all your people speak English?" I finally asked him two things I had wondered about.

"Well, first of all Anka is very much in love with an artist from the shore. Michael's taught her a lot and she in turn taught me. My people don't speak English, in fact our language is a mixture of sounds and images that we convey to each other through one of the talents."

"Talents?"

"Michael put them into surface terms and called them paranormal. He said we are touch oriented with empathy and telepathy."

"Was that how Anka knew I was starting to feel pain, she felt it herself?"

Dion nodded, "When she shook your hand, I didn't realize because I wasn't touching you."

"And all the other times you were," I said almost to myself.

He nodded anyway and then added, "Michael says the other talent is psychometry. When we touch an item, we get impressions from that item about its owner or the last person to touch it. If we concentrate we can learn from these images. Maybe that's why it's frowned on to possess any surface items, but a lot of us do anyway. Most don't understand what the pictures they see mean, you have to understand the language which they don't. My people have isolated themselves from the surface dwellers and from any knowledge of them. But there's always been the curiosity of the unknown and some of us go out of our way to learn."

"Are you in trouble for saving my life?"

"No, only in bringing you here. I should've taken you back and left you on shore. I have to admit, my curiosity got the better of me. If my questions annoy you, tell me and I'll stop."

"They don't bother me, but do mind if I ask some of my own?" He shook his head and I continued, "Your people have been thought to exist only in myths and legends. And even if they were real once, since all myth is based in fact, they couldn't possibly exist in a modern world. So if your people do, what about the other creatures that are part of myth, do they as well?"

"What creatures?"

"Dragons, unicorns, elves and the Loch Ness Monster for that matter."

Dion looked confused, "I'm afraid I'm not sure what you're talking about. If you're speaking of fairy tales I'll ask Anka, she's more familiar with your literature than I am. But I heard from one of my cousins about a large creature in the Lochs."

"Amazing, Dion. I'm going to enjoy talk...", I yawned suddenly, "...ing to you."

Dion grinned, "Not till after you get some sleep."

The next day Dion and I were discussing the differences of our worlds, when another female showed up. This one was even more beautiful than Anka. Her long blonde hair nearly white and her scales a deep burgundy. She looked me over from head to foot.

"You wanted something, Val?" Dion asked annoyed by her presence.

"Oh yeah, father wants you right away. Don't worry, I'll stay with the surfer."

"Sorry Ray, I'd better go speak to him."

I nodded and before Dion dove back under the water, he touched Val and she frowned shaking her head.

She watched him disappear and for an instant when she turned back to me, her dark eyes seemed to spark with red flame but it was gone when she smiled at me.

Val examined me carefully and I felt uncomfortable under her steady gaze. With some surprise I realized it was making me feel something else as well.

"Sorry for staring, I just wanted to see what got the brat in so much trouble. You are a pretty one," she said as she stroked down my arm and across my chest.

I felt my manhood begin to take notice of this attention. Val softly kissed my cheek, ear, forehead and lips. I groaned as my body reacted to the gentle touching. She giggled and continued stroking and kissing. She had just brushed against my prick when a sudden surge of water followed by a loud bellow of "Val!" sent my seducer back down into the water.

"Sorry Ray," Dion apologized, "Val can be a pest. A real handful."

"That's okay, I have sisters too, believe me I understand. I'm afraid, though, I have a real handful of a problem here," I said breathlessly.

Dion looked at my painfully aroused state and lifted himself to sit on the rock shelf so he could easily reach me. "I can take care of that for you," he whispered as he began to stroke and fondle my cock and balls. I climaxed with intense pleasure when he finally actually sucked my organ.

After I got my breath back, I thanked Dion and looked over the handsome merman. The blue-green scales started at his waist and flowed into a graceful tail with no sign of any sexual organs.

"Well at least you don't have this problem," I sighed as I fingered myself.

"Are you kidding, " Dion replied as he turned his body toward me. The scales beneath his waist split slowly apart and a large set of fully aroused genitalia slipped out.

I stared as I realized how well hung the merman was. My only comment, "Handy that," was rather inane.

"Problem is, in this state they can't go back inside."

"You'd get that from fondling me?"

Dion nodded.

"Well since I was the cause of the difficulty, I should be the solution." With that I took him in my hands. While fondling and caressing, I examined the other man. There was no opening around the fleshy bundle. Where the scales stopped the skin began and I licked the smooth rosy flesh. I reached behind Dion sliding my hand down what would've been the ass cleft on a human. The scales once again split apart under my probing finger. When I felt the puckered muscle I slid my finger inside. Dion groaned softly and climaxed as I sucked the engorged shaft. Dion tasted salty but pleasantly so and without realizing I climaxed as well. My hand drifted down the scales that felt like satin. I started to brush back but Dion grabbed my wrist.

"No, they can be sharp that way, you might cut yourself." I pulled away and Dion's genitalia slipped back inside and the scales slid slowly closed.

I moved toward him and once again stroked the entrance to his body, "You have an arsehole."

Dion laughed, "How else do you think we excrete?"

"I never thought, hell, I never thought you people really existed especially males. Even in myth, they were seldom mentioned."

"Well, we are a bit rare," Dion commented matter-a-factly.

"And then some. Do you mind if I look you over?"

"Not at all, be back in a sec." Dion dove in the water and was gone about ten minutes. When he came back, he lifted himself totally unto the rock and allowed his frontal scales to slid apart and his heavy package to descend. He then turned on his side to allow me to examine his rear. Like in front where flesh began the scales ended. The heavy thick muscle protruded slightly out from his body. My finger easily slipped inside aided by a kind of natural lubricate. He felt like velvet. I nearly giggled to myself at the image of satin and velvet. My other hand stroked the long silky dark hair. He's a mixture of textures I thought as I let my finger move deeper. Dion gave a soft groan when I touched the prostate.

"Do you mind if I have a look at you?" Dion hesitated, "I've never seen a surfer before up close."

"Of course not, you showed me yours, I'll show you mine," I flipped over and he turned to examine the entrance to my body. At his gentle probing I reacted. Dion turned me around and soon we were entwined in a sixty-nine position. We pleased each other thoroughly although by this time there was very little emission, but still enough to enjoy each others' flavor. Then I turned around and we're lazily kissing and tasting. I drew his tongue in sucking it and let him explore my mouth. He reciprocated and soon I was probing his. The slightly pointed teeth were sharp on the backside and I was careful not to cut myself, remembering his reaction when I had nearly done that with my hand. Dion dozed with his head on my shoulder until his need for water forced him to leave.

The next day, Dion brought me a kind of seafood stew for my meal. The rest of the day we spent in mutual loving, exploring and talking mostly about the old myths.

"Now that I've experienced your sister Val's seduction technique, I can believe the stories of the mermaids luring the sailors to drown in the seas."

"That's sirens not mermaids," Dion stated. "Sirens are half-birds or sea nymphs not mer. Mermaids just use to comb their hair and sun themselves while sitting on the rocks. Men would come along ogling their beauty and not watch where they're going and crash into the rocks or ground their ships by coming far too close to shore. Nothing to do with the girls themselves. But over time that got mixed up with the siren's legend and now mermaids have a bad reputation."

"Okay that explains that one, but what about merman being old deformed men?"

Dion actually winced at that. "Ah bad judgement on the mers' part. Our males were as beautiful as our women and much in demand. So much so that our females decided to put them someplace safe. Unfortunately, one time they chose a deep trench and over a long period the intense pressure caused some deformities. One of the men died and his body drifted to the surface and was found by your people. In no time at all, story got around and merman are ugly and deformed. Strange how everything gets distorted over time, isn't it?"

His wonderful sense of humor delighted me, "Oh Dion, I love you." Suddenly I realized that was true. I'd never felt this way about anyone. Dion's sisters were very beautiful but neither could make me respond with a mere glance like he could. I threw my arms around him and we were soon involved in mutual loving. The next few days were involved in mutual exploration on all levels until the morning he was again occupied with another parental meeting and Anka kept me company so Val would stay away.

"Ray, thank you for being so good to Dion. I'm glad that his first encounter with a surfer has been pleasant. You could have reacted differently or rejected him totally, maybe scarring him for life, but you didn't."

"I couldn't do that, Anka, he saved my life. And since then, I've just enjoyed his company. In fact," I admitted to her, "I'm in love with him."

She nodded, "I know and it's true for Dion too. It's all been a special time that you'll both remember with love and joy."

Just then Dion returned and Anka kissed us both and dove underwater. He didn't say what his parents had said but he was especially loving and attentive. Afterwards he stayed with me as long as he could, left for a bit and then returned. I knew it was our last night and stored the memories of it for the empty lonely years ahead.

In the morning Dion handed me a breathing mask and holding onto me tightly, he pulled me into the water. I took one last look around our cave. The rock shelf that had become my home was quite wide and the water below never got more than a few feet from it even at low tide. Those had been the times when Dion had to sit on the shelf to care for me. At high tide, he could lean over the rock and remain in the water. That is until we began making love, then he had to lift his whole body up onto the rock. Now I grabbed his hand and smiled and he took me under the water. We swam out through a tunnel and headed slowly to the surface. Depth hadn't been that great but Dion stopped often to let me rest. At last we came up under a wooden dock.

He held me close and explained, "Michael has been told everything and he'll help you in whatever you need. I loved our time together and I wish, well I think you know what I wish." He reached up to the door above his head and knocked. It opened and he looked up, "Thanks, Michael. Goodbye Ray," He then kissed me farewell. My last sight was a quick wave and a flip of his silver fin.

Michael had waited until Dion and I had our moment before he came forward.

"Ray Doyle, I'm Michael Court," he introduced himself and reached down his hand to help me up the narrow steps. "Come inside, I've dry clothes for you."

I followed him from the pantry porch where the trap door was located into a nice comfortably furnished cottage. Michael was a very talented artist as the paintings on the wall indicated. They were mostly fantasies, particularly of mermaids, Anka most prominent. A few of mermen, even one of Dion.

I took a shower and dressed in the clothes Michael had left out for me. When I entered the kitchen, Michael had laid out a delicious brunch. While we ate I explained about CI5, Cowley and the fact that I had to account for three weeks missing from my life.

"The best is to stay as close to the truth as we can. You were found out, beaten and thrown overboard. Somehow you managed to get to my beach where I found you. I treated your injuries and you were totally out of it. No idea who you were, but you were absolutely adamant about not going to the police. When you came to your senses, CI5 and Cowley were foremost in your mind and you called in right away."

"Temporary amnesia?"

"It happens or it wouldn't be such a cliché."

"You'd back me? Why? You don't know me."

"I'll back you because I promised Anka I'd do it for her and Dion. He needed to know that your life wouldn't be damaged by the time you spent together. And I need to know that nothing will be said of the people to endanger their existence."

"He didn't ask me to keep silent."

"But he knew you would and he's right, isn't he?"

"Yeah, nothing would make me betray their society, not even Cowley."

I didn't need to betray them because Cowley bought my story. I returned to CI5 and my everyday mundane life. Well as mundane as life on the A-squad could be but I never forgot my merman lover. Women were pretty and nice but they weren't who I really wanted. At night I'd replay our loving and I'd feel again the gentle touch of his lips, hands, mind and body against my own. I'd feel again the double sensation of loving and being loved and realize with a start that it was my lover in the flesh not just a treasured memory.

His body was sun-warmed and tasted slightly salty from the dip in the sea. Our loving was as it always was, very satisfying.

Afterwards when we lay in each others' arms, my beloved asked the question that'd been on his mind from his first sight of me on the bed.

"It felt as if you're already making love to me when I kissed you, what were you thinking of?"

"Ever since I recounted my story to Jessica, I've been remembering what really happened. It was very pleasant but not as much as experiencing."

Bodie laughed, "The real thing is always more exciting. By the way, what did Jessica say to you that got you chuckling this morning?"

"She said she'd liked the story very much but it was totally unbelievable."

"Of course, Ray," Bodie continued to gently kiss his loved. "It was after all just a fairy tale because everyone knows there's no such thing as a merman."

I pulled my lover down under me, "Right, pulled that one out of my mind, did you?"

Bodie shook his head, "Now would I do a thing like that..., on second thought, don't answer that, just come here." His lips captured mine and I began making new memories.

In the morning I got up to make us breakfast. I knew Bodie would be hungry, he always was after a night of loving. Oh hell, he always was. Besides I had promised him a special one every morning of our holiday at the cottage. On the way to the kitchen, I passed the painting in the hall and stopped to examine it. It pictured Dion sunning himself on a rock with his long dark hair hanging loose and blowing in the wind. As I put the kettle on, I reminded myself of the first time I'd seen that canvas.

After I was back on active duty, I thought of Dion daily. I'd hope eventually everything about him would fade into a lovely pleasant memory instead of the constant ache it was now.

Then one morning, Michael called saying he'd like me to visit him as we had a mutual friend to discuss. So all day my mind drifted to thoughts of Dion, fortunately I was stuck in files otherwise my distraction may've proved deadly. Late afternoon I had an appointment with Cowley and requested some time off.

"Doyle you've been preoccupied lately to the point where I've been afraid it might be dangerous to you and those around you." Cowley stated his concerns. "I'll give you this time off during a slow period so you can get your house in order because at the end of ten days if you don't, retraining may be needed."

"I'm sure I can resolve this, sir and thank you."

I got out of there quickly before Cowley changed his mind and after throwing a change of clothes in a carry-all, I was on my way to Michael's.

Michael came outside to meet me when he heard my car drive up. We entered the house and the first thing I saw was the half-finished canvas on the easel. It was a depiction of a merman sitting on the rocks. His blue-green tail, long dark hair and fair-skin seemed to glow. I felt tears flood my eyes and leak down my face.

"So it's-like that, then?" I looked up at his words. "Go into the side bedroom and talk to him."

I raced into the room stopping at the sight of a very pale Dion sitting in the chair by the window. Dion looked up, smiled tentatively and held out his arms. My face burst into a huge grin as I rushed into his embrace.

Kissing tenderly and passionately, I held him close. "I've missed you so, love."

- "Do you really want me?"

"How can you doubt," My voice dropped off as my hand brushed the blanketed leg.

"Leg," I cried startled. "Dion what did you do?"

"I made a bargain, it's not permanent, won't be until midnight."

I removed the blanket carefully. Dion's legs were pale and thin blue veins ran like spider webs down them. The prickly hair tickled my palm as I rubbed down the skin gently. My satin was gone. A slight sound made me look up at deep blue eyes that watched intently. I reached up and took Dion's face in my hands and kissed him thoroughly. His teeth now longer pointed and sharp. My hands trailed through the short silky hair. My satin was gone but at least I still had the silk.

Dion pulled away sensing my disappointment. I'd forgotten his abilities.

"You don't want me like this. It was the only way we could be together and I thought that was what you wanted. I guess I was wrong, I'll go then." He got painfully to his feet and started to move slowly toward the door.

"No!" I yelled afraid of losing the one person I wanted most, legs or fins. "You're wrong, I was just startled by the changes. I want you, believe me. I love you. I dreamt that you grew legs or me a tail, so we could be together. That was just wishful thinking, on my part but you've done it. Love," I pushed Dion down on the bed and proceeded to show him just how much he was wanted and loved. In the sweet afterglow, I questioned him further. "Why's the hair so short? I liked it long."

"Can't just walk out of the water and start a life on shore in today's world. Your people are often lost at sea and my cousin, Gael, collects their valuables. She's terrified of the surface but fascinated by your people. When she found a photo that resembled me she gave it to Anka. It turned out to be a billfold with complete ID. Anka gave it to me when she realized what I intended to do, knowing I'd need a land identity." Dion reached over to the nightstand, picked up the leather billfold and handed it to me.

I read the information, "William Andrew Philip Bodie. Twenty eight, dark hair, blue eyes, height, 5' 11", weight 11 stone. It matches all right. He's a handsome enough bloke, but you're a beauty. And all mine."

"Do you mean that, love. Please be sure Ray because when these changes are permanent if you leave me, I'll be alone and..."

His words were stopped by my engulfing mouth. After the kiss ended, I stated, "No regrets, no doubts and no turning back. Now exactly what did you do?" I scowled as another bout of pain shook his body. "Isn't there anything we can do to ease that?"

"My new legs and feet ache but it's the new skin that really itches and burns. Pain comes in waves sometimes."

"There should be a medication of some kind for it."

"Michael and I tried them all except, well..."

"What?"

"Lover's cream," Dion said shyly.

"Oh," I took him at his word, started pumping myself and climaxed over Dion's legs. Massaging it in, I watched as a look of relief and disbelief appeared on his face.

"I thought she was joking when she said lover's cream would soothe the burning."

"Who's she?"

"One of the coven. Three women and one man form our magic circle. They're the only ones that could give me legs and make me an air breather. For a price of course."

I looked worried, "What price?"

"Well, I am taking a fertile male out of our population. So first they gave me something to increase the production and then they, ah.. milked me. My tail was split and the fins formed my feet. The scales dissolved and left me with new skin. Lastly my lungs were changed to breath air instead of water. Then I was brought to the surface and Michael was waiting to take care of me. None of it's permanent until the deadline. If I go back into the water before then, everything returns and I can never come near the surface again. My body wouldn't be able to stand pressure changes any longer. If I stay out of the water, I become completely human."

"And you're legs will stop hurting?"

Dion nodded, "So they tell me. They should steadily grow stronger. Right now I can barely stand. You'll have to help me to the water if I need to."

"I can tell you one thing, love," I said almost angry at the suggestion that the possibility existed, "there's no way I'm letting you anywhere near the water."

I then commenced loving Dion, for the first time actually taking possession of his body, until well past midnight. We were too involved to even notice when the hour occurred. It was the strangest but most wonderful loving we'd ever had. It felt as if he was penetrating me at the same time I was in him. The climax was the strongest and most pleasant we'd ever experienced. After being loved so thoroughly, he fell fast asleep. A short nap later and I woke, cleaned up a bit and feeling thirsty went into the kitchen. Michael was making himself a cup of tea and a snack.

"You're still up, Michael?"

"Yeah, I had to get some work done. Since my house guest came, I've been otherwise occupied. Now that you're here, I can entrust his care to you. Am I correct?"

"I'll take good care of him, don't worry about that. Ah, how long has he been here?"

"Nearly three weeks."

"Three weeks! Why didn't you call me sooner? The deadline was tonight," I exclaimed.

"Ray, the dea... ah when he came out, he was in terrible pain. He didn't want you to see him like that. Your decision had to be based on what you really wanted, not pity or guilt."

"Why tell me this now?"

"You made your decision, obviously you're going to take him home." Michael stated as he handed me an empty cup.

"Yeah, I love him and can't live without him." I poured myself a cup of tea. "Might lose my job though, not really sure how the boss will accept me living with a man."

"Well you're both welcome to stay here as long as you need."

"Thanks Michael for all you've done especially getting me here before the deadline."

"Ah, Ray the deadline was nearly three weeks ago. Once the changes start in earnest, they're irreversible. He decided to stay and wait till he was well enough for you to see him."

"But why did he say the deadline was now?"

"Not sure, only that he said you needed to see him. That he'd wanted your decision, but it had to be your choice. He didn't want anything to influence. He's not really ready yet, but he was determined it be now."

"I'll ask him about it later. But thanks again Michael. Ah, I wondered if you'd sell me the painting I saw on the easel?"

"I intended it to be a wedding present, so it's yours now."

I smiled in remembrance, "Yeah I guess we did at that."

"Did you... ah have a feed-back of the sensations?"

"Yes, it felt like I was doing it to myself as well as him. Strange feeling but pleasant. How did you know?"

"Dion's and Anka's people are touch empaths. When there's a soul bond they send back the same feelings that they are getting."

"Can he read my mind? I remember he mentioned telepathy and empaths among his people, but he never said that it'll be between us."

"It's not exactly mind reading, more a sensing of emotions. Our thoughts make really no sense to them until they've become familiar with our language, so only strong feelings come through. Dion only knows our language from what Anka taught him from me and what they can get from a surfer's personal property. Sometimes the images they receive make no sense since they don't know what happens in our world."

"You're talking about psychometry. Dion told me about that ability."

"Yeah, you should ask him what he gets from that billfold. When he tried to explain what he felt from this Bodie, he refers to him as B, I couldn't tell what the images meant. One that I did recognize was getting dressed in the morning after a shower. Try explaining clothes to someone who's never had any or any need for them."

I shook my head, "You know, I hadn't really thought about all that Dion has to learn. Could I take you up on your offer for a place to stay for a few days. Maybe with your help, we can ease his transition to the surface race. Then when he's more comfortable with our world, I can show him London. Oh, this is all so incredible, scary but wonderful at the same time."

"Yeah, I know. I've had something similar with Anka. Of course, we couldn't go too far from the water, so she's only seen some things in books and magazines. You can take Dion everywhere, I envy you that. But I'd never want Anka to go through what Dion did for you. You're one very lucky man, Ray. Dion loves you so totally that his people realized that he'd die without you, so they let him go."

Whatever Michael would've said next was stopped by the inhuman yell. I ran into the bedroom closely followed by Michael.

Dion was curled up on the bed in a fetal position, softly sobbing, "No, no it's not true."

"Dion!" I cried as I gathered my love in a close embrace. "What's wrong?"

"Ray," Dion sobbed as he returned the embrace. "I thought I... You were gone. I thought... I dreamed."

"Oh love, I'm real and I'm here for you, always." I took Dion's mouth in a passionate kiss and Michael quietly slipped out of the room.

I smiled again in remembrance of that reassuring loving and found myself again in a loving embrace that became real.

Bodie's kiss was a great morning wake-up, always had been. After he released me, he frowned in mock exasperation. "You're doing it again aren't you. What am I going to do with you?"

"Keep showing up when I get to the sexy, ah interesting parts, I much prefer the real thing to a memory any day."

"So what got you to remembering now? Still thinking about Jessica? What would she say if she knew the truth about her uncle Bodie, hey?"

"Don't know. Might be interesting, but that wasn't it. Was the painting Michael gave us as a wedding pressie. It reminded me of trying to introduce a merman to his new world. What joy Michael and I had."

"You two had. Just imagine it from my side."

"Well it took another two days before your legs were strong enough to support you for any length of time. We decided to use the time to teach you about clothes. Although you did insist on wearing that towel all the time."

"Not all the time. My skin was still hurting although regular applications of lover's cream helped a lot. Nice that there's a use for it, isn't it? Ah anyway the towel was only when Michael was around. You seen my everything all the time, but we never opened in public among my people. After having it all tucked neatly inside, leaving it all hang out left me feeling rather too exposed. I liked that once my legs stopped hurting you gave me one of your briefs. The tight fit made me feel much more secure. I knew how they were worn by watching you and from B's memories."

"Yeah it always surprised me how out of all the clothes we told you had to be worn, you actually liked the underwear. I thought it'd be too restricting. Now I understand why you needed them. After you starting wearing them, it was hard to get you to take them off."

"Ray, be serious. I always took them off for you."

"Sure did, right on command. But getting you to wear anything else was difficult."

"I always did exactly what you and Michael wanted like a good little boy. Now where's my breakfast?"

"Ready in fifteen, why don't you take a shower."

"Good idea, Batman." Bodie kissed Ray and then walked to the bathroom. He took off his robe and stepped into the shower. While towel drying his hair, he went into the bedroom to get dressed. Putting the underwear on brought Ray's words back to him and he thought back to that first time.

I was so glad to have the tight briefs on even if there was still some discomfort from my still burning skin. I preferred having my package under wraps as it had always been. Next on was the swimming trunks so I could at least go outside for exercise. Once outside we found out my skin, not just the new but all of me, was very sensitive to sunlight and I soon had to deal with a very painful sunburn. Fortunately, lover's cream took care of this too.

Michael purchased a strong sun block lotion, but they decided that I better wear more clothes especially since Ray intended to start me running each day to strengthen my legs. Jeans were the order of the day unfortunately they're very tight. Ray's would never fit me and Michael's were covered in paint. So I had to squeeze myself into paint-coated jeans that rubbed against my new skin and leg hair constantly. I was really aching by the time we got in from whatever we were doing that day.

More torture was yet to follow. I never had worn anything on my chest and since Ray was worried about me burning my shoulders, he insisted I wear a t-shirt. At least it was a soft material although a tight fit. The absolute worse, however, was shoes. I never had feet before and now I had to stuff these aching swollen things into something resembling their shape. Makes my back teeth ache just thinking of it. At first Michael gave me a pair of slippers that were soft leather slip-ons. Those weren't too bad, neither were the tennies that Ray picked up so I'd have something to run in as long as we stayed on the sand.

That's when I discovered the tops of my feet were even more sensitive to the sun. After they got burned, Ray gave me a pair of socks. Restrictive but again they were soft and my feet were protected. Once we moved to the pavement, Ray insisted I get a pair of running shoes for more support. We looked through the catalogs and I flashed on B's memory of heavy leather boots. It was one of those images that'd made no sense until I saw them in the catalog. Now I felt every foot problem the man had ever had and he'd plenty. My feet ached in sympathy.

"Ho, did you fall asleep. Breakfast is ready," Ray's bellow brought me back to the present so I finished dressing and went on into the kitchen.

"What took you so long?" Ray demanded after I entered the room and sat down at the table.

"I was stuck in memories, thanks to your mentioning the underwear." I then dug right into Ray's special omelet thus closing the subject or so I thought. With Ray I should know better.

"I remember that first time Michael and I took you to town. Forgot the exact reason why, but we went to get you use to more people."

"We went to get me running shoes and I needed them fitted not the size just guessed at. We took the car which was a whole new experience. Watching you drive, I flashed on B doing it. He drove a lot and I begged you to let me try. The impression was so strong from him, I was sure I could do it."

"And I said not without a learner's permit and a safe area to do it. You pouted until we arrived in town, then you're too involved in sight-seeing to care about driving."

"Well, I'd never seen a town before other than Anka's picture books. There were so many people rushing around doing all kinds of things, I was amazed. And the shop windows with all their wonders out for everyone to see, terrific."

"I remember having to drag you away every time you stopped to inspect something. It took forever to reach our destination but finally we had you fitted. Michael drove and we walked back to break in the new shoes."

"And talk about what happened in town when I'd tried to thank you with a kiss for the shoes and you pushed me away as soon as I got near you. Scared me, all I felt was rejection."

"That's when we discussed how society felt about our relationship and public displays of affection between males were not only frowned on, but dangerous."

"I didn't understand at all, my people, although no one exposed their privates in public, could openly express love in other ways. Falling in love with a man was never objected to, only that he was a surfer."

"And took you away from the water."

"You didn't take me, I ran from them to you because I wanted to. They understood that, didn't like it, but understood."

"And the deadline was long past by the time Michael called."

"You knew that," Bodie asked surprised, "but why didn't you ever say anything?"

"Got distracted with other events. Why? Were you so sure of me that you took the chance on dooming yourself in this world? And why then and not before or later when you were stronger? Your skin was still burning and your feet painful. Why that timing? I always wanted to ask, but, well maybe I was afraid of the answer."

"We should've talked about this long ago. Sorry, love. No, I wasn't absolutely sure of your commitment. I only knew that I couldn't live without you and I was more likely to at least see you if I was on land permanently. Continuance of the species demanded that we each have at least one child, but after I visited the coven, their solution made more sense. I would give all my fertile seed to them for use by those that had none. I wouldn't be required to take care of any of those produced as I would be if I'd remained. Parental obligation is very strong in my people. Once the changes started, I didn't want to go back. Anka and I have always been rebels but only in our desire to see and learn about the surface world."

"When the transformation was in progress, let's just say a lot of it wasn't very pleasant. I really don't want to ever relive that not even in memory. I think Michael was a saint to put up with me then, all for love of my sister, he's amazing. Suffice it to say, if you saw me at that time, that overdeveloped guilt complex of yours would've made me an obligation instead of a choice. I didn't want that and as to why then. I felt you needed me desperately."

"I did, but how did you know?"

"We formed our soul link after I got legs, but the mind link started the night before you returned to the surface. My people are touch telepaths but once a link is generated, it acts as a constant touch with one's other half. I felt your depression and knowing the kind of job you did, I was afraid something would happen to you before we had any chance."

Ray came around to Bodie's chair, reached down and pulled him to his feet in a close embrace. "No regrets, no doubts and no turning back ever," with those words he sealed their vow with a loving kiss.

Bodie broke their kiss and whispered, "Let's go for a walk, love."

Ray nodded and they went out to walk along the beach side by side, sometimes touching and sharing their memories.

The education of my merman was a fascinating time for me. Fortunately he was a very quick study. Shown something once and he was able to do it. The more he performed the actions the better he got. He also received a lot of images from B's property, but often times the connection to those experiences wasn't made until he did or saw the action himself. Everything was new to my lover and he made everything new to me.

Michael owned three of the cottages along the beach, a legacy from his grandmother of a once larger estate. He lived in the one and rented out the other two. One of the tenants was moving to the continent next month and Michael agreed to rent the cottage to me after he left. I figured the cottage could be our retreat if I still had a job and our home if I didn't. At least there, Dion would be able to see Anka occasionally. I knew how much they loved each other and I'd do a lot to please him after all he'd done to be with me. It occurred to me that a TV and VCR would be a good way to introduce some concepts before he actually had to experience them. Michael didn't own a TV only a radio and stereo. He'd no objection to me purchasing a television to later be moved to our cottage so that now it could act as a teaching instrument.

The TV acted as a visual window to many of B's experiences for both of us and I really began to wonder about what kind of man this W.A.P. Bodie was.

"What if he shows up, Dion?" I asked since very little mention was made of the man personally. "He could've just dropped it overboard."

"He didn't. I felt him drown after he fell into the ocean during a storm."

"What kind of man was he?"

"You wouldn't've liked him. He was cruel a lot of times and nasty mouthed. A lot of his words I never heard until we were in town the time that man wearing a black leather jacket dropped the crate off the back of his truck. You remember the words he was muttering after it shattered the crockery inside. Then the pretty red-haired lady tried to calm him down. You said he was swearing and using foul language, not done in public, well B does that a lot. There's other things too, I'm not sure how to explain. Things that were in those action movies we watched, but not exactly."

"It's okay, you don't need to detail, but if what he experienced makes it easier for you to learn about life then I'm glad B's life was so full of variety."

In a week's time Michael and I had shown and taught him everything he needed to know about the rural community. The next step would be London, but at least through the TV, he'd a better idea of what he'd soon be encountering.

The drive back to London allowed me more time to acquaint him with the way of the world. Anka had started to teach her brother to read and he soon became a voracious reader. He sat in the passenger seat reading the newspapers and questioning me about the articles.

"You know I just realized that this world isn't always a very nice place, but I don't regret leaving my more 'safe world' for this one because there I'd be without you and that I couldn't bear."

I looked over at him and fell in love all over again. "I love you, too, Bodie," using his new identity's name as we agreed to do once we left Michael's.

I drove back to my flat and showed Bodie how to open the special locks.

Once inside I put a call into HQ via the phone line. "Central, this is 4.5. I'm back in my flat for the duration of my holiday. There'll be a lot of coming and going, do you want me to notify each time? Okay, I'll respond then. Yeah I had a nice time, thanks. 4.5 out."

"Sorry," I kissed him on the cheek, "had to let HQ know it was me who disengaged the alarms, otherwise they'd be sending an agent to check on it. Ah you'll get use to the security."

He didn't say anything as he started to explore his new home. I took his hand and led him around the flat showing him where everything was and how to use it. Bathroom was our first stop after the living room, since we both felt in need of the loo. Michael only had a bathtub so I demonstrated the use of the shower. He was fascinated as always although he'd seen showers often on the video tapes.

"Turn the water off now I said as he continued to play with the different settings on showerhead. We'll take a shower together later, now the kitchen's next."

He followed me out of the bathroom but poked his head into the bedroom and dragged me in with him.

"Oh, okay, bedroom first. This is a king-size bed."

"It's huge," as he stared at it. "What kind of king?"

"No king actually, it's just a term for the size of bed. There's a twin, like the one on Michael's porch; double, the one in Michael's bedroom; queen, a double and a little extra in width and finally king, two twins."

He had gone closer to examine and suddenly sat down on it. He bounced once and grabbed my hand pulling me down on top of him. His lips found mine and we soon were involved in a time honored use of a bed. Afterward I dragged him to his feet. "Okay now we take that shower," I told him as I led the way back into the bathroom.

The shower stall was just big enough for two. I soaped his back and he did mine. While rinsing off Bodie started kissing me, which naturally led us right into making love under the water spray. We had to lather up all over again before we could leave. I dried him with my biggest fluffy towel and he reciprocated. Two robes hung on the back of the door. I took one and handed him the other.

Finally I was able to get him to the kitchen. I showed him the microwave, something else that Michael didn't have, but a necessity of my life. To demonstrate I took out two frozen dinners from the freezer and walked back to the microwave. Opened one box and placed the contents in the oven. Before I could do anything further, the other box was snatched out of my hands and Bodie was reading the package.

"Says eight minutes at high, turn 1/2 turn and then another eight minutes," he read.

I showed him how to set the timer and start it. At the sound of the bell, he reached over, opened the door, turned the dish 180 degrees, shut the door, reset the timer for eight minutes and started it.

"You've done this before?" I asked.

"No, but B has plenty times."

I nodded again grateful to the long dead B for his experiences. Bodie did the second dinner by himself while I set the table and put the kettle on.

We ate and discussed what we should do first. After dinner I turned on the TV to watch the news, a requirement in CI5 to keep us up to date.

After the news, I played a couple movie tapes that showed everyday living in London as well as the story's plot. The theory being to show him things before he encountered them for real.

The next day, we hit the streets, just a window shopping trip to get his feet wet so to speak. He was fine until lunch time. In the midday rush he couldn't avoid people bumping into him. His mind shields had to be reinforced and concentrated on to block out the sensory overload. I could tell it was bothering him so we returned to the flat after grabbing takeaway for dinner.

When we got inside, he grabbed me in a close embrace burying his face against my chest. I felt him trembling and lifted his head to look at him. He was totally exhausted and near tears from the effort of keeping up his shield.

"I'm sorry, Ray. There were too many emotions and strange words I never heard before."

"How do you mean strange?"

"Gut, schwarz, dreizehn and fraulein."

"That's German. It's another language like English, but spoken in the country of Germany and by people whose ancestors were from there."

"Oh, B knows it well. I have several images of him speaking it to various people. He's also in a place with lots of tables where everyone speaks it and he's eating something called Hasenpfeffer. Does that make sense?"

"Yeah, sounds like he's in a German restaurant."

"I know what a restaurant is, but German?"

"Every country has its own way of preparing food. Sometimes someone opens a place where he serves just his country's cuisine."

"Are they any good?"

"Some can be."

"Could we try one, maybe German?"

"Tomorrow, okay, right now we have chicken takeaway to eat."

"Okay, I'm starved."

We sat down to eat and after an evening of TV tapes. This time I chose tapes dealing with other cultures. Once he'd identified a problem or image, he could deal with it. It was the not knowing what things were they caused him anxiety.

Each day's exposure to people taught him to increase his shields and make it instinctive so he no longer had to concentrate to maintain.

He became fascinated with other languages and cultures. Specifically different countries' cuisine. I told him we didn't have to experience everything right away. He should pace himself and make a list of places he really wanted to see now. Leave the other places and things for later. He agreed that was a good idea.

The next day while we explored the part of the city near home, he discovered a book store.

"Ray, look a whole place with just books! Lets go inside."

Before I could protest, he was inside looking at a large book on automobiles.

"Ah, Bodie," I interrupted his reading. "You don't read the books here. You just look at them to decide which to buy, purchase them and take them home to read."

"Oh, look a book by Keats. Anka's favorite poet. Can I buy this for her?"

I looked at the small volume of poetry. "Sure, we'll give it to her as a thank you gift."

I took the book from him, walked up to the counter and paid for it. Then I led him out of there before he found something else to occupy him.

We were just crossing the alley next to the book store when Bodie yelled my name and shoved me and himself against the building's wall. A second later a huge lorry came speeding down the alley and crashed into a parked car across the street. A heavy set man came running out of the alley.

"Are you two all right? The brakes wouldn't hold, I'm really sorry. Excuse me," he said as he walked over to the policeman who was examining the damage.

Another officer stepped up to me. "Are you or your companion injured, sir?"

"No, we're both fine. Just a little shook. Do you need us to stick around? We're on the way to dinner."

"No sir, that won't be necessary, if I can just have your name?"

I handed him one of my business cards. "You can always reach me through that number."

"CI5, cor I don't see there'd be any trouble at all, sir. Have a good dinner." He shook our hands and left to join his partner.

Bodie grinned, "You really impressed him."

"Got that from the handshake?" At his nod I continued, "No, it's not me it's bloody CI5. Impresses or disgusts people no end."

"I think I really want to meet this George Cowley, now."

I looked startled and stammered, "Where did you get that name from?"

"The police officer, he was thinking George Cowley head of CI5. Your boss, right?"

"Right. Hold it before we get off on this tangent. How the hell did you know that lorry was coming?"

"Didn't know what it was. Just knew it was some kind of danger and we're in its path."

"Another talent, huh?"

"Danger sense, you need it when you're in hostile waters." Bodie's stomach growled.

"Oh come on stomach, I'll take you to dinner."

"Great, I'm starved."

Bodie loved to eat. He was absolutely delighted by different flavors, especially chocolate. I tried to get him to eat healthy, but Michael was a junk food junkie and Bodie was soon hooked too. At least by sampling other cultures' cuisines, he got a more balanced diet most of the time. Tonight was the German restaurant I promised him. He surprised me by ordering in German even if he was only repeating the sounds from B's memories. I was so impressed with that and learning of his 'danger sense' that I agreed to a rich chocolate dessert.

The rest of my leave sped by quickly as we became tourists and explored London's sights. Bodie had made his list of places he wanted to see and I did my best to visit every one while I was still on holiday. Some of the places I'd never been and those that I had seemed brand new looking through my love's eyes.

It was the day before I was due to return to duty that I really thought about what I was going to tell Cowley. If I was to remain in CI5 and stay with my love, Cowley would've to vet him. That was when it dawned on me that we knew nothing about W.A.P. Bodie. From what my lover got, *Bodie's* experiences were eclectic and the only comment was that he wasn't a very nice man. Well if there was any problem, I would tell Cowley the truth about Dion as hard as that would be to prove. And if I was out of CI5, maybe I could have Michael give me pointers on being an artist again or I could be a motorcycle mechanic.

After a very special evening of dinner and loving, I prepared to leave in the morning. I cautioned him about the special alarm locks and he was content to stay home and watch videos or read. We kissed goodbye and I was off to work.

At HQ I saw my assignment was files all morning. Betty called me mid-morning about the appointment Cowley had me scheduled for in the late afternoon.

I showed up on time and for once Cowley was ready to see me as soon as I got there. I entered his office at his invitation and sat in the indicated chair.

"All right, Doyle what's on your mind?"

"Sir, I wasn't completely honest in my reports from the Chaker op. The one where I ended up beaten on a beach near the Fens."

Cowley nodded but said nothing. "Well sir during that time I met someone and fell completely in love. I thought it was an impossible romance so I tried to put it out of my mind. I found I couldn't."

"So you'd met a lass and her family objected to it, end of story. Only what, she's decided to defy her parents to be with you anyway?"

"Not exactly sir, you see the lass is a lad."

"That's not in your profile, Doyle."

"I know sir, I never felt like this before, but I love him. He's very special."

"He must be if you're risking your career for him. He'll have to be vetted like any potential spouse."

"I know sir," I pulled out the photocopy we'd made of his ID. "That's his name and other information."

Cowley took the piece of paper. "I'll get on this right away. You have that court appearance tomorrow and after that light duty for the next week until this data on William Bodie comes through. Dismissed."

"Sir." I left his office, straightened up the files had yet to go through and exited the building. I made a stop at the bank on the way home since I remembered that Bodie needed new clothes. I also picked up Chinese takeaway on the way. Bodie was thrilled by the whole new variety of tastes.

Later in bed, we discussed the interview with Cowley and what impact it might have on our lives.

"There's still a chance I might be out of a job. I know Cowley wasn't pleased at all."

"So what can I do?"

"Nothing, except love me."

Bodie pulled me into a tight embrace and whispered, "You know I do."

"I know love, guess I'm feeling a little depressed. Ah do you think you're ready to go out on your own?"

"Yeah, I'm careful and my shields are really strong now. Why?"

"I have to be in court tomorrow, but I wanted to get you some new clothes."

"I can go out and get them myself."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, I'll be fine. Can I come back here or should I wait somewhere till you get home?"

"I'll give you a key, anytime you're ready to come home, you know how to undo the locks."

"Great, love you, Ray. No matter what happens remember that."

"Well if you give me some reminder, I think..." The rest of my words stopped by his overpowering mouth. Our loving was sweet and gentle because that was the way he was feeling.

In the morning I left for court and he for the stores. I told him exactly how much he could spend and what pieces of clothing he should get.

Court proved to be very routine. I just had to testify what Murphy, Jax and I had done in the Tallver house and be cross-examined by the Tallver barrister. I was stuck in court for the rest of the day, but my mind was contemplating what Bodie was up to.

By the time I reached home I was tired and frustrated because the case had not gone our way. Three weeks of hard work down the drain. Bodie met me at the door with a cup of tea and had dinner ready to go on the table. After our meal and drinks we sat in the living room to talk about the day.

"Okay, so what happened at the stores?"

"Well I took a cab downtown, asked the driver where was the best place to get men's clothes and he took me to a large store. A very nice but nervous little man helped me choose a wardrobe. He said I couldn't go wrong with basics."

"Right," I kissed him on the forehead. "Fashion show time, love. Let me see."

He went into the bedroom and in a few minutes he came out dressed in a three piece brown suit with brown socks and shoes. The shirt was cream with a little brown design all over it. I sent him back and he returned in another three piece this time black. The final one was a gray outfit. Well basics is right.

"He came back the final time in his robe and cuddled up to me on the couch. "I've disappointed you, what did I do?"

"Nothing, sweetheart, it's just me. Sorry, let's go to bed."

Once in bed, he worked hard to get me out of my mood in the only way he was sure would work. He was right as usual.

During the next day at work, I received the summons to Cowley's office for me and W.A.P. Bodie first thing the next morning. The day was, thankfully totally uneventful as I was once again stuck in files. My mind was definitely not on my job and when I returned home, I found Bodie a nervous wreck. He'd been getting my feelings all day long, but had no idea as to its reason. After I told him, he was upset all on his own. Our dinner was good but neither of us tasted it and our lovemaking later was almost desperate. Sleep eluded us but we held each other throughout the night.

In the morning, Bodie dressed very carefully in his gray three-piece. He was extremely anxious about the coming meeting and I wasn't much better. Cowley had left orders at the desk to come to his office immediately upon our arrival at CI5 headquarters. I led the way to the Controller's office and knocked.

"Come in, Doyle." Cowley called out.

I grabbed Bodie's hand and squeezed it firmly which caused him to give a nervous smile.

"Together?" he asked.

"Together," I confirmed and opened the door.

We both saw the W.A.P.B. file on Cowley's desk.

"Sit down, gentlemen."

I started to say something but the beautiful relaxed smile on my lover's face stopped me cold. More amazing still was the genuine smile on Cowley's face.

"Well lad, how could you pick such a despicable character?"

I was about to answer to that statement when I realized Cowley was speaking to Bodie.

"My cousin thought he resembled me and when I left the water I needed a surfer identification."

"How long ago, lad?"

"Three weeks." Bodie turned to me touching my shoulder in comfort, "It will be all right Ray, Cowley has an old soul and he's recognized me as one of the people."

"I take it you two have bonded so there's no point in my trying to split you?"

We nodded.

"Were you are warrior or hunter in your enclave?"

"Both," Bodie replied, "I'm the second son."

"How's your danger sense?"

"Well developed," I answered, "he shoved me out of the way of a runaway lorry and I had no idea anything was even there."

"That's good to hear because I'm sending you both to Jack Crane and then on to Brian Macklin to mold you into a partnership. Meanwhile I'll set up a new identity for Mr. Bodie, one that won't get you thrown into prison where the real Bodie belongs. He's dead isn't he?" At Bodie's nod, Cowley went on, "I assume that you've picked up a lot from the deceased Bodie's property if the legends are true, that is."

"They are and I'm empathic and telepathic on contact."

"Hmmm, that may come in handy later. I think this could prove to be an interesting team and good for CI5 so I'll take a chance on preparing you for the field. You just might prove to be the partner I've never been able to find for Doyle. You've the rest of the day off for you both to pack. Meet with Jack Crane at the Manor in the morning. Dismissed."

I left the room stunned, not only did I still have a job, but my lover would be my work partner. Even the prospect of time with Crane and Macklin couldn't dim my hopes for our future together. We went home, enjoyed a meal and went to bed. The sleepless night before caught up with us and we both slept a sound uninterrupted sleep.

In the morning we left for the manor and found out what plans Cowley had for us. He'd given Bodie a background similar to B's own. Mercenary and military instead of law enforcement as mine was. Jack had no idea what Bodie really was, it seemed that would remain Cowley's secret. As far as Crane and later Macklin were concerned Bodie had been recruited from the military and Cowley wanted him trained to be my field partner.

Bodie's talents soon proved very useful indeed. B had been on many such training exercises so Bodie knew what to expect. The first time he fired a gun, his flash from B showed him to be an expert. He could draw on that experience and with practice get just as good on his own. The same thing was true with explosives and other firearms.

Our silent communication teamwork surprised even Macklin and we finished the retraining in record time. Soon we were back at HQ on minimum danger duty - files, surveillance and research. Cowley wasn't going to risk us until he was more sure of Bodie's abilities. We became the perfect team, totally in sync with each other on the job as we were in private. Little by little the ops became more difficult and dangerous as Cowley's faith in one of the people confirmed itself.

A little girl, godchild of a friend of Cowley's, was kidnapped. Cindy Justin had ripped the mask off one of her kidnappers leaving it behind. We all knew she'd be killed once the ransom was paid so time was of the essence. Bodie held the criminal's mask hoping to learn where they were holding her. The images he received of a large empty building with some broken crates made me think it might be an old warehouse. I combined his insight with old fashion police work and a hunch about the father's former partner. After discovering that Clifton Pintner owned a few old warehouses, I alerted Cowley to our findings. He sent out agents to quietly check out each of the properties until one was found to have suspicious activity.

The A-squad raided the building and all the kidnappers were captured with little trouble. Bodie and I personally rescued the little girl who became completely enamored of my partner. She absolutely refused to let go of him and he had her in his arms when we left the building. Cowley had walked up to the entrance when Cindy was suddenly thrust in my arms and Bodie shoved our boss down just as Pintner took a shot at him. Jax and Turner quickly grabbed and disarmed him. The whole lot of them were taken into headquarters. Cindy had once again gained my partner's attention and they were having Cocoa and chocolate biscuits when her parents came to take her home.

The squad was very pleased with their newest member's success and Cowley felt justified in bringing Bodie into the unit. He rewarded us with a four day holiday which started the rumor that Bodie was Cowley's blue-eyed boy, oh if they only knew the truth of it. We didn't care what was being said at HQ as we drove up to the rented cottage for our own private celebration.

Bodie had stopped walking and pulled me down into an embrace. I could feel his lips, my lips as he sent me the double sensations. When I felt his response, I reached for him and opened my eyes to stare at walls of rock.

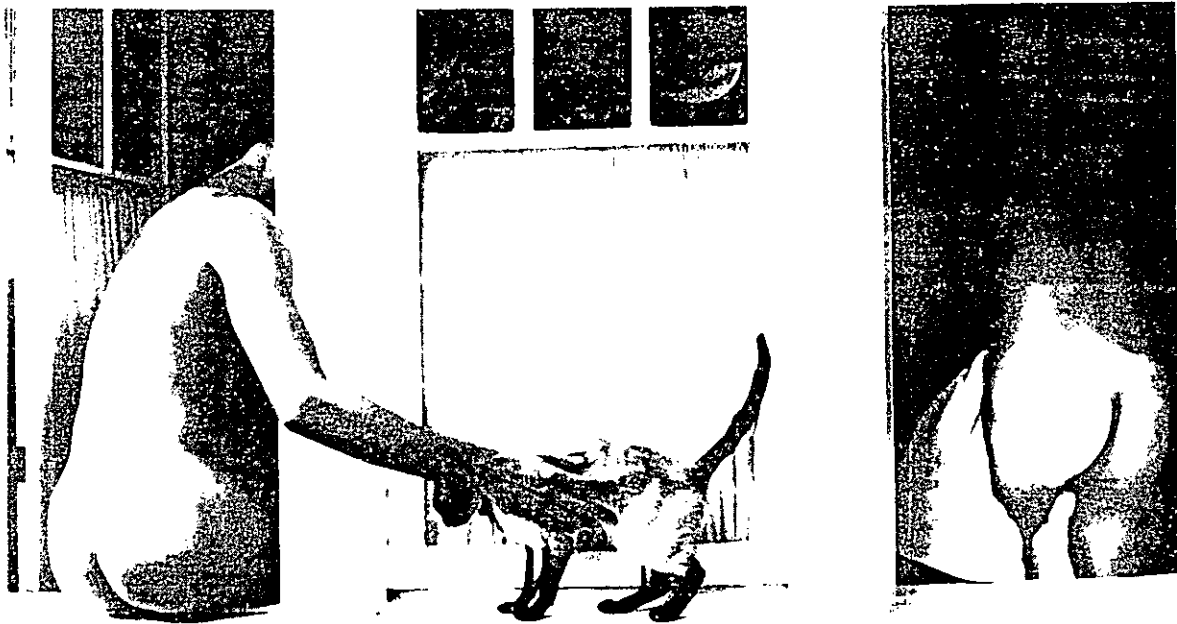
"Back with me again, are you?" Bodie kissed me. "Remembering is nice but we came here for a different kind of celebration."

"You found us a cave."

"Very astute as always, Raymond." Bodie laughed then his eyes softened in that special way. "It's not the same one, of course, but since it started in a cave, it's only fitting that we celebrate our anniversary in one as well. Happy anniversary, love," he said as he continued to kiss me all over.

I responded with all my love and affection, "Happy ten years, Dion, and to many, many more."



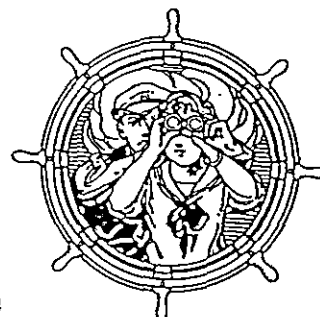


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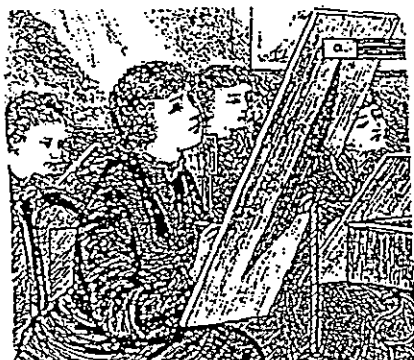


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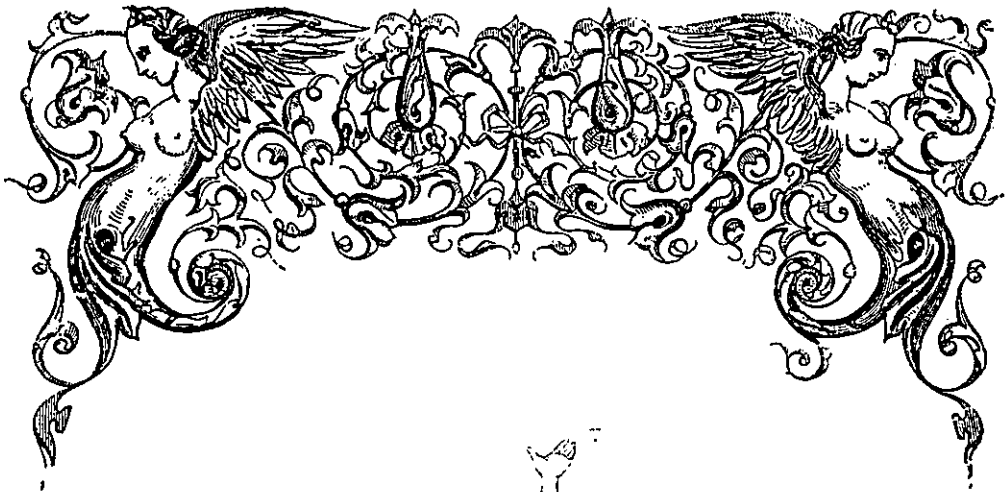
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